

Jujutsushi Wa Yuusha Ni Narenai

Act 6: Cannibalizer

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Epub: [Trollo WN/LN EPUB](#)

Chapter 57: Yokomichi Hajime

The name's Yokomichi Hajime. Just a bit of an otaku, but otherwise a perfectly normal high school student.

September the 21st. It's yet another lifeless Monday. Haah, man, life sucks balls. Even when I'm dead tired from watching late-night anime in real-time, do I really gotta do this in literally the crack of dawn? Make Mondays in the afternoon. How about you make that a law, damn useless politicians. I'm a taxpayer ain't I? For like, when buying shit.

So while having these deep thoughts about politics and shit, my cool and mannerly face makes it to class perfectly on time.

"Fuu—, bufuuu—"

Panting hard. What the fuck, why's my class gotta be in the frik'kin' 3rd floor. You wanna cripple me every morning? I'm not payin' cheap tuition here, get a damn escalator. Like c'mon, it's literally the 21st century.

"Bufuh, look guys, Porky's wheezin' a lung out"

"Didn'cha hear him go oink oink just now?"

"Dude, don't be mean, you KNOW Porky can only make porky noises"

Oy, I can hear you, totem-poles. What's with these fuckin' mob characters. Wanna fight me? I got the absolute MASS to crush you flat faggets. Are you literally retarded? This is kung-fu 101.

Ahh, screw this, today's just a plain, shit day. Fuck you too, damn small-fries.

But I'm not one to cause a ruckus. I'm super gentle, and a pacifist too, so I'll let those fuckwads off with a little stern look.

Hmph, damn right, ya losers. They stopped their retarded yapping after I looked a little. Scared of my bloodlust no doubt. I can take down small-fry of their ilk with some simple eye cont—

"—Oi Porky, the fuck you look'nat"

"BUUH!? I-I'm wasn't..."

"Ah? Lyin' to me, bitch? If ya got something to say, say it lardass"

"Hey like, isn't that enough Higuchi~? Yokomichi's scared outta his pants"

"But Kyouko, fags like that gotta be—"

"Dude, we're like, totally not first-name BFFs"

"What's the big deal, wai-, ow, stop hitting me, hey"

Ff, Fuck... All these fucks... Fuckin' DQN Higuchi. He got the totem-pole trio as his lackeys and acts all high and mighty. Loser king of the loser monkeys. Fucking bastard, if I got serious, you're dead mate. I'll get you someday. I'll fuck you up.

Higuchi Kyouya. In short, a delinquent. A piece of DQN scum that doesn't belong in our high performance demanding prep-school, Shiramine Private Academy. He's the type of human trash I hate most.

And I have to add that Japanese laws are too soft for letting this sort of bastard roam freely. DQNs like him should be on put down. It's because they let these scum of the earth have rights that we still can't achieve world peace.

Once I think up a means to a perfect crime, it's hasta la vista baby.

Have fun with that little slut of yours, while you can.

Tch, Randou Kyouko you fucking slut. Don't go around thinking you saved me you bitch. Any woman hanging around DQN scum are just as bad.

Just look at her, this Kyouko girl looks like an absolute slut every way you look at her. No way she isn't selling herself. 30,000 for one go I bet.

Her hair's even dyed blonde. It's an dirty yellow unlike Reina, who's a natural. And it don't suit you either, ugly. She's all glitzy with a metric ton of make-up on, and looks like those prettied up actresses (hags) you see on TV.

Not to mention, that tan. Like Oi Oi woman. Her skin's burnt brown like those ganguro gals. She's like a girl version of those totem-poles, but even her group of cronies don't have their skin baked like that.

Blond hair and black skin, she's like a model slut if I've ever seen one. A dirty woman who's probably lost her virginity in the 5th grade.

But, I will acknowledge those big tits and ass. If it's just the tits, she'd be #1 in our class 2-7 that's full of all the hot chicks. She's the biggest— well, if we don't count that irregular of a pig that is Futaba Meiko, she's still #1. Trust me on this. Kenzaki Asuna and Takanashi Kotori have big ones, sure, but Kyouko's are massive.

Just do JAVs already. I'll even fap to it twice for you— oh crap, popped a boner.

“Bufuu—”

Calm down, me, think of flowers and kittens. Can't let people see this, I got my cool image to keep. I'll just find my seat while Higuchi and Kyouko are fooling around.

Fuuh, geez louise. At times like this, I need to stop looking at ugly sluts and refresh my eyes with some real babes.

“Unbelievable, nii-san, I take my eyes off you for one second, and this happens. Please try to restrain yourself a little.”

“Ahaha, you worry too much Sakura. I'm completely fine see?”

Souma Sakura was chatting at the front of the classroom. That girl is undoubtedly the hottest babe in this class, no, in all of Shiramine Academy, I boldly claim. That face, those proportions, that personality, it's all 11/10. A perfect girl, as if she was literally hand-crafted by God.

Although, I myself feel sorry about the plebians who fall for Sakura. Me? I got my eye on this one girl. She's quite the diamond in the rough.

“Bufuh... Yukiko...”

Head on her desk pretending to sleep, there lay my sweetheart, with her seat conveniently right next to mine, Nagae Yukiko.

Yukiko is a plain, somewhat short, and docile girl, and like me, never tries to stand out in class. With those out-of-trend, thick, black-rimmed glasses, and furthermore, being a member of the literature club, her description only bolsters her plainness attribute.

But I can tell, you see. Those losers who go for Sakura or Reina, or even Asuna

or Kotori or Class Rep, they've all got a case of shit taste. So it's only me who can tell. Where Yukiko's real charm lies.

"... They're, practically twins"

Soft, silky, and short cut black hair, black-rim glasses. A small, delicate looking body that seems it would break from a simple embrace. Not to mention that superbly ephemeral aura around her... That's right, from the masterpiece that triggered my long journey into otaku-dom, The Melancholy of Suzuhara Haruka, she's almost identical to one of the heroines, Nagae Yuki. Hell, even their names are a syllable away, this has gotta be fate.

I really thought it was destiny. Yuki is my beloved. Despite the numerous otaku media in various formats which I've since consumed, she is someone I still claim as mai waifu. What I want to say is that Yukiko is literally the advent of my Goddess who has transcended the wall that is the 2nd dimension to encounter me.

In other words, Nagae Yukiko is my waifu.

This Yukiko is the only sunshine in my boring school life, and I would spend this shitty Monday basked in her once again— but that never happened.

GI, GIGIGI, GI— IIIII!!!

As that sudden dissonance rang, my peaceful everyday life had come to an end. And what awaited me, was a fantasy world of swords and magic.

That's right, on this certain day, I, Yokomichi Hajime, a totally normal high schooler, was summoned into a parallel world.

Eh, wait a sec, this is just like—

"Buh, Bufufuh, let's do it... In this new world, I, will have the Strongest Cheat and will become the HAREM KIINGG!?"

I so shouted in ecstasy as I was thrown from the classroom into the jet-black abyss.

"WHAT THE FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK!? WH-WHY'S MY JOB A FUCKING WARRIOR, FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK!"

Bull-fucking-shit, what is with this normal as fuck Job!? What 'Warrior',

gimme a fucking break, this is literally the definition of weakass mob-tier Job! I can't even expect hidden cheats from a friggin' Warrior... I REFUSE to use an axe. That weapon that, in like, every game and anime, is super shit-class. I will never, NEVER use it!

"Why dammit, Why Warrior of all things... Why mee..."

Where the actual fuck is God! Bring me to the white dreamscape where you apologize for sending me to this world by accident, do it now! And because you can't send me back, load me up with a ton of Cheats, you fuck!

What's the big idea making me Warrior! You telling me to die!?

"Cheat! I want my Cheat!? Hand it over! Limit breaking Status values! Unique Skills! Get me a Skill Stealer! Give me the Sage's Knowledge! Super-tier Magic that only I can use, or let me build Modern Weaponry, anything dammit! Parallel worlds are meant for this shit you LAZY FUUUUUUUUUUUCKS!"

For a while, I screamed out my completely justified anger at the jackass of a god, and reluctantly began my dungeon capture in search of a harem.

"—Fuh, Bufuh, Fufu... Ahh, I get it now, so it's like that"

What I mean is, this is totally a Growth Cheat right? It gotta be right, right?

"Bufuh, what 'monster', scared me for a sec. These are all slime-level small-fry"

The first prey I killed was a goblin you'd find in any RPG. They're apparently called goma or something, but parallel world rules can suck it. I'm calling this thing a goblin.

Anyway, so this fuck ugly goblin was walking around by itself like a moron, so I took a stone brick I found laying around and bashed his head in from behind. You don't show mercy to monsters. We're in a life-or-death situation here. I'll even shut away my heart if it's for the sake of survival. (badass)

Well, the goblin went down with one shot. Then, I got 3 EXP!

Yeah no, there's no EXP. Still WTF, how come there's no Status Screen here? How am I supposed to check my growth if there's no leveling system? I guess it's that. You can't see your stats unless you get a card from an Adventurer's

Guild?

Whatever. I just beat this goblin, so I got my hands on the rusty sword it had. It was sorta slimy to hold, and had this awful stink, pretty much the worst grade weapon, but holding a real sword... Kukuh, how should I describe this, like your blood is boiling? Seems like, even though I was a perfectly good, law abiding, citizen and student in my peaceful homeland, I was in fact, a born warrior at heart.

“Buheheh... Ain’t gonna lose now”

A wild Goblin appears!

Is it the last one’s friend? After I got my sword, they kept coming one after the other. But small-fry, they are still.

“With my insane talent, I don’t even need a damn Cheat!”

Force Boost: Boosts Strength. Strength of a Warrior.

Toughness: New vitality rushes into the body. Even in battles of attrition, it bolsters courage.

Accel Boost: Reaction speed boost. Speed boost. Dodge the enemy’s attack, and counter.

The Warrior’s novice skills are nothing special and are all common stat boosts. BUT. It’s well within my talents to go from Common Skills to World’s Strongest.

With a single rusty sword, I gloriously curb-stomped like, 10 of those goblins.

Slash: Boosts attack power. A sharp strike cuts the enemy.

And I quickly got a battle art too.

“Buhahah! Hell yeah I’m strong! I’m hella strong... And I’mma get stronger!”

Whether it’s goblins, or skeletons, or zombies, or zombie dogs, I fucking ended them all. The more I kill, the stronger I get. There’s no Level display, but I know, I know it in my gut. I can feel my Status rising like no tomorrow. I learned a shit load of new skills and battle arts too.

Ahh, this is it, this is that exhilaration you feel when you grow right? It’s

fucking great. I can't go back to vidya after experiencing this. That stuff is for retards.

"Fuck YEAH! I'm simply awesome! I'm lucky as fuck!"

From this rickety box that positively screamed 'treasure chest', I got my hands on a real sword. Rusty swords are so trash, who'd even use that junk.

This one didn't have a smidgen of rust. It's a brand-spankin'-new blade. And big too. The blade-width is double that of the goblin's sword, and the length easily surpassed a meter. Like a bastard sword? Donno man.

But it's definitely got a size and weight that normal people wouldn't be able to handle. That's right, this isn't for plebs.

I'm different. If I try picking it up with my epic strength— Look, so easy. It's just the right weight. Yeah, it was such a pain in the ass cutting away at all those small-fries that came in packs. A big sword to mow 'em down is what real pros do.

"UHoh!? Holy balls, this is EPIC!"

I literally blew away 3 goblins in one fell swoop. O-fucking-P. I'm getting too OP here.

I can't get enough of this euphoria from slaughtering these half-pints. All their blood splashing everywhere is disgusting, but with the high I get from putting them through a human blender, I don't give a single fuck. The buzz is real.

"Bufuuuh, getting tired of these weaklings. I need myself a boss fight"

It happened right as my zeal for dungeon capture was at an all time high.

"Somebody, help—"

Chapter 58: Nagae Yukiko

Nagae Yukiko was a plain girl. Compared to the many distinctive girls of class 2-7, young ladies positively brimming all with their own individual charms, in such a box of gems, Yukiko could be described as very ordinary. Her face, despite being slightly on the prettier side, wouldn't turn any eyes.

But that was fine. Yukiko didn't want to be an idol or anything. Standing out wasn't fun, being stared at wasn't fun either. If she could live out a calm, quiet, peaceful school life, that would suffice. No, as of late, Yukiko's life had already undergone a very exciting change. She had been feeling happiness the likes she'd never felt before.

But on the morning of September the 21st, that joyful student life of hers came to a sudden and abrupt end.

"Uuu... What's, where, am I..."

She opened her eyes in a dim stone-built room. If she were to believe the mysterious announcer, she was likely already inside a dungeon in a parallel world. That would certainly be the case... But one could not expect Yukiko, the normal high school girl she was, to suddenly have a grasp of the situation. That would also be the case.

Having wept in despair for a time, Yukiko ultimately started moving according to the man's instructions.

"Job... Cryomancer?"

With her three starter abilities, Eis Sagitta, Eis Shield, and Eis Mist in hand, Yukiko, with nothing better in mind, decided to look for her scattered classmates. Mustering up her courage, the girl began her search into the eerie passages interlacing the dungeon.

"Hii-i, Wh-what, what is, that..."

Attack, defense, and additionally, magic that could release a mist so as to confuse the opponent or allow the caster to escape. Yukiko had all the components necessary to put up a decent fight, but that never meant that she

actually could. Even if you had a gun and knew how to use it, it didn't mean you could shoot with it accurately in deadly combat.

Yukiko would waver even when shooting her ice arrows at the monsters called red dogs that were no bigger than stray dogs. So there was no way she could handle a goma, that vile creature that was exceedingly uglier than a human, but also exceedingly close to one in shape.

Yukiko could only shake in fear, silencing her breath as she progressed through the dungeon. The only magic she could bring herself to use was the one that would hide her from enemies, her Eis Mist.

"Uuu, sniff... I hate this... why, how much longer do I have to do this..."

She would spend more and more time in the fairy squares, crying to herself. But wait as she may, no one would come to her rescue. All her classmates must be ahead of her, making good use of the powers granted by their Jobs. So she must keep moving. To once again meet her good friends, her reliable classmates, and most of all, that person she held dear.

With whatever courage she could still muster, Yukiko relied on the cold mist that would hide her as she dove once again into the dungeon. And naturally, her control of said Eis Mist had progressed. She could now release it freely and control its thickness. She even learned a new spell.

Eis Mirage: Can project the caster's image while inside Eis Mist.

Numerous times did Yukiko pass around packs of monsters using her adept control of the mist and her ghostly decoys. She had grown a knack for being unseen.

But like all things, there came a limit. The dungeon wasn't so sweet as to let one survive simply by running and hiding.

"Hah, hah... No, help..."

Shrill beastly grunting followed behind her. It was the cry of goma. A savage cry symbolizing their exaltation and sadistic ecstasy from hunting down a helpless prey.

At a corner of a certain forested dome, Yukiko was soon discovered by the

horde of goma.

“No... No no...”

Once seen, Yukiko’s powers of visual deception were halved. And with their numbers, the goma would eventually run into her in the fog, no doubt.

Yukiko ran desperately. She wasn’t a fast runner. She wasn’t good at sports at all. But she ran. Even if she was out of breath, even if her legs broke, she ran.

They were goma. She already knew of the cruel, gluttonous nature of these creatures from her notebook. But even if she wasn’t aware, she needn’t make a big guess on what these hideous demons would do once they captured her. She didn’t have to guess, her instincts were screaming.

That she would die once caught. That, after seeing the depths of hell, after experiencing excruciating pain, she would die.

“NO... Please help... Somebody—”

She had no choice but hope for rescue. Anyone would do. It didn’t matter as long as they saved her.

“Somebody, HEEEEELLPP!!”

And sure enough, someone did indeed come to her rescue.

“HYA’HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!”

A large, black figure suddenly appeared on the scene. It carried in hand a large shiny sword and—

“—SLAAAAAASHHH!!”

With a single swing, the horde of goma, that were almost at her neck, were all sent flying.

“Hiii!?”

Head, arms, legs, all flew. Human shaped creatures were chopped into pieces in cold-blood. But unlike in movies or anime, the scene wasn’t toned down in the least. The gory deaths of those living creatures were burned into Yukiko’s eyes.

Goma were monsters, sure. But at this moment, Yukiko saw for the first time

how their blood was the same red as her own.

“Bufuh, FUFU FUH, DIE!”

Reluctant to let go of their prey, the goma roared as they trampled over their fallen comrades to face their new enemy. Seeing which, the man with the greatsword gleefully continued his massacre.

“Die, DIE! Diiie, ya fucking mobs!”

He swung everywhere like a chaotic storm. No Style, no form, nothing that could be called technique. But the oversized blade, swung around with the might of a giant, was more than apt for the task at hand.

“Fucking, won’t even make EXP, these shit ass mobs! Die, DIE, ORA!!”

It was a fight akin to devastation. Seeming as a unilateral slaughtering of the enemy, and at the same time, like the chore-some work of crushing red fruit in a mixer.

“Buhyahyaha!! DIEE!! DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, ORA-ORA-ORA-ORA-ORAA—”

At this point, it was a mere calculation of absolute difference in status. Simply, Artless Extreme (bullying of the weak).

“— I’M FUCKINNGGG STROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOONG!!!”

And then, no more goma remained as far as Yukiko could see. They may have all been slashed into slabs of meat, or perhaps a few survived to run away.

At any rate, the only thing reflecting in her eyes now was the man who had saved her. The man who stood in the middle of a lake of blood, garnished in pieces of meat and garbage... Doused red in blood, stinking of rotten fish, and with a figure uglier than even a goma, there stood her savior.

“Bufuuuh, fuu, fuuuh...”

The man heaved his shoulders up and down in large strokes, wheezing like a pig as he slowly calmed down. In fact, his body was obese enough to make his semblance to a pig almost uncanny. His height was a standard 170 cm (5'7), but his abnormally swelled gut and girth made him look much larger.

For the petite Yukiko, it would be no exaggeration to call him a giant. She felt

such a pressure.

This man then swayed with a swing of his body and turned himself to Yukiko's direction. From beyond the lenses of her thick spectacles, a pair of muddy black pupils stared at her.

"Hii!?"

She couldn't bring herself to express thanks.

Young women like her were generally not good with blood. Let's take an example: say there was a man obstinately hitting on such a woman, and say another unknown man jumped in, in an attempt to save her. But, it turned out that the 2nd man was too strong, or rather, that man had gone into a frenzied storm with his fists... How pitiful, the flirtatious first man now had his face smashed in, bleeding profusely from his nostrils, his front teeth broken off. All in all, a terrible sight to behold.

Having been shown such a live performance of gruesome violence, any normal woman would think like so: 'I'm scared.' She wouldn't feel anything other than fear. Her heart skipping to make her say, "Thank you, I've never met a strong and handsome man like you", wouldn't even be the last thing on her mind.

Nagae Yukiko was only an ordinary high school girl. It wouldn't matter that she was on the verge of death. In no possible way could she have her heart burst into love and affection surrounded by a scene of senseless slaughter. The colors dying her small chest were not too dissimilar to the ones she had as she was being chased down by ravenous goma. Blood red fear, and pitch black despair.

"Gufuh... A, Ahh, Uhhm, Nagae-san, are you Alright?"

His blood-soaked face grinned crookedly. Yukiko instinctively looked away.

"... Y-yeah... al, right..."

She answered in tears, words somehow mixed in.

"Ahhh, I, I See, Great, AAh, that's GREAT! You Loo-looked like you were in Trouble!"

“!?”

He edged forward. Yukiko shivered as if by recoil. But she somehow managed to hold down the scream that was right at her throat.

“A, Ahrr, Are you still Scared?”

“Ah, uu... It was... r-really scary”

“It was, was it, it Suuure was! Buhahahah! But rest Assured Nagae-san! You’re Safe as long as I’m here! I can swat away Goma like Flies, and most Other monsters can’t do much against my Awesome strength—”

“Hi-, ii...”

As if a tap had burst, Yukiko, having reached the limit of her endurance, devolved into a weeping mess. Gotta stop crying, gotta answer him now, she thought. But in spite of her will, the tears once let set loose would no longer stop.

“E-Eh? You’re Crying!? why, Why the Hell! I saved You, I beat all the Goma, SEE!?”

“S-sorr... I’m, sorry... It’s s-still scary... I was, so scared... I can’t, calm down yet...”

Her head was turning strange from terror and despair. But Yukiko still managed to muster up every inch of her survival instinct, for a final, desperate act of resistance. This act was, to lie. A woman’s lie, purposed to deceive a man.

“Ah, AAAhhh, got it, I totally Got It! Yup, that’s Right, I’m not the Dense MC type, so I get what you Actually mean, I totally actually got your Message!”

“Y-yea... So, I think, I can’t stop... A little, more...”

“Bufuh, fufuh, don’t Worry, Fuhii, don’t worry your pretty little Head, Nagae-san. I will, proh-Protect, yuuu”

His repulsive wheezing snared in her ears. Yukiko’s crushing dread didn’t even allow her to raise her head to look. The man was already at arm’s-length.

“Nagae-san, I will, Always, protect You! Fuhih, Fuhih...”

She feels something slimy touching her head.

“!? Nn, kuh...”

Her head, was being stroked. By a greasy, blood-smeared hand.

She was psychologically repulsed to the brink of losing consciousness. Mortified to the point where she was considering instant suicide, Yukiko gritted her teeth, and painstakingly answered,

“Y-yeah... Thank you... Yokomichi, kun...”

“Buhih! Don’t sweat it! And you can just call me Hajime! And I’ll call you Y-yuhi-Yukiko alright!”

Had she fallen into some cruel god’s sadistic game?

Nagae Yukiko. The savior sent down for her in a moment of crisis was— The single most loathsome boy in Class 2-7. It was Yokomichi Hajime.

“Somebody, help—”

I heard it. It’s Yukiko.

I thought it was destiny.

“Bufuh, fufuh, don’t Worry, Fuhii, don’t worry your pretty little Head, Nagae-san. I will, proh-Protect, yuuu”

Our fates were practically entwined.

When I saw her, Yukiko was being chased down by goblins and driven into a corner. If she’s caught, I’ll get to see the plot-line of a dounjin played out.

And, that’s where I come in!

This, is literally happening... Is this, legit light novel-tier plot, is seriously gonna be happening!?

Being OP as fuck feels too good already. But now, Yukiko’s watching me, my sweet, sweet Yukiko is laying her eyes only on me. And I showed her alright. The coolest, most epic thing a man can do. I had her witness how I can and will protect the girl I love.

She’s pretty much in the bag now. Yukiko Route, full steam ahead.

“Nagae-san, I will, Always, protect You! Fuhih, Fuhih...”

Would you look at that. Yukiko looks so damn happy with me stroking her head. Her shoulders are trembling and she's sobbing quietly. This has gotta be because, after being almost crushed by fear, she is relieved to the point of tears from being rescued by her ultimate savior. That's me.

It's okay, Yukiko. I'm here for you. I'll always be here for you, babe. I won't let 'em touch a hair on your body.

Chapter 59: Yokomichi Hajime and Nagae Yukiko

Nagae Yukiko was in despair. She was already in a dungeon where man-eating monsters strutted about. But of all things unlucky, the one she had to pair up with turned out to be Yokomichi Hajime.

The title, Gross Otaku, wouldn't fit anyone better than him.

If it's only a passive interest in anime, manga or games, most boys would be involved in at least one of those. Even Souma Yuuto, alongside his wholesome practice of kendo, would on occasion, play video games, enjoy manga, chat with his classmates on those topics; getting a disapproving word from his sister on as a result.

There were also boys with a greater than average interest in the domain. In Yukiko's eyes, the mismatched pair that was Momokawa Kotarou and Saitou Masaru would be described as normal otaku, and most others in class likely thought so too. There were plenty of other otaku-ish boys around, so these two never stood out. They were basically living quiet, non-outstanding, peaceful school lives, where they wouldn't cause any trouble unless it was something big, and in addition, never inspired any disgust from others, making them accepted as members of the same class.

But in stark contrast, there was Yokomichi Hajime. Even though Saitou Masaru was similar to him, being fat in addition to being an otaku, the former wasn't hated. In fact, his over-excitable personality actually gathered a positive impression of him in class.

Yokomichi Hajime and Saitou Masaru. The fundamental difference between the two, in complete honesty, would be in their character. Yukiko didn't know what was going on in Hajime's mind, and neither did she wish to know. But considering that he would repeatedly cause problems in class, it would be fair to brand him as ill-mannered.

Every word of his came out as complaints. Always cynical, never focused, denying everything. On the spring of entering section 7 of their 2nd year in highschool, Saitou Masaru, as a fellow otaku, called out to Hajime who stayed in

his lonesome. In response,

“— Tch!! This is why I hate filthy casuals!”

Snapped Hajime, and Masaru, predictably, also got mad, starting off a dispute. Yukiko should know, she was there when it happened.

It didn’t devolve to the point where the homeroom teacher would intervene, or they would be sent to the counseling room, but Hajime would often get into similar squabbles with other people in class too.

Thus, come the dawn of Golden Week, he attained the nickname of Porky. The boys hated his self-important guts, and the girls detested his simply ugly appearance. Yokomichi Hajime was thus, isolated. Like the saying goes: let the sleeping dogs lie, as such, it never turned into bullying and everyone simply ignored him. But this in fact protected the peace of Class 2-7. Since basically, Hajime never called out to anyone himself.

“Here, Yukiko. We only got walnuts, so eat up”

And at present, that Hajime was behaving as if he was her closest friend— No, as if he was her lover, he was being insistently over-familiar. For the already weak-willed Yukiko, that act itself was incredibly terrifying.

“Ah... Mm, thanks...”

With trembling finger tips, she received the fairy walnut from Hajime’s hand. Those hands that had just now finished murdering Goma were dabbed in plenty of blood. Naturally, the walnut grasped by such a hand would also be... But Yukiko couldn’t allow herself to shout, “That’s filthy!” in refusal.

“— Hii!?”

Yet, she ended up letting out a small scream because, the next moment, Hajime grabbed her hand. Even when simply touching with her fingertips gave her such an awful sense of repugnance, having her whole hand tightly grasped gave her psychological damage akin to cockroaches crawling all over her palm.

“Ah, my bad, it’s just”

‘Just’ what exactly? She had no interesting in what sort of flawed logic in his brain made Hajime suddenly grab a girl’s hand he’s not even close with. But she

at least understood that such an action doesn't 'Just happen' and she realized the ulterior implications behind it.

"Yukiko, your hand's, so warm"

Her spine chilled over. The feeling struck her like lightning, the feeling that, as a girl, her body was in danger.

But the frail Yukiko could do nothing but stiffly shake her shoulders. She could, in no way, draw back her hand.

"N-not really... They're, normal"

Her only form of resistance was a curt response. She must not let this man see her fear. Much less her disgust, that, she absolutely cannot hint at.

"I'll never let go of this hand. Yukiko, I'll always protect you..."

Spouting incomprehensible and unreasonable bogus, Hajime reluctantly lets go of Yukiko's hand.

"Uuu... Uu..."

Finished with their unsavory meal of walnuts and water, Hajime had fallen asleep, and Yukiko finally got a chance to wash her hands. She kept her hands sunk in the chilled fountain water, unconcerned with her fingers numbing from the tips, simply needing with wash, cleanse, and purify herself.

"I hate this... I can't, stand it anymore..."

Yokomichi Hajime was strong. He was wholly relying on the power of his Warrior Job, but he, nonetheless, brought out its potential and wielded it as his own.

He had the gall to tell her, 'I'll protect you', with his stinking breath, so at the very least he seemed to have concern for her safety. In fact, whenever they encountered any monsters, Hajime would keep Yukiko behind him and hunt down those beasts with determination. Despite the fact that he looked like a psychotic killer intoxicated in blood and violence, it was also fact that he actually protected Yukiko from those fearsome monsters.

As long as she was with Hajime, she would be much safer than if she was alone. She could live without a constant fear for her life.

In spite of that, this situation, where Yukiko was alone together with Hajime was, as a young woman, presenting an unprecedented danger to the thing most important after her life.

Hajime had yet to come on to her forcefully. But, having her head stroked, and just before, with her hand... His actions were clearly escalating.

She wasn't one to boast an abundance of experience with men, but Yukiko could at least tell when one's gaze was muddied in desire. She was not interested in whether Yokomichi Hajime was truly in love with her, but she couldn't help but realize how he was lusting after her like a dog in heat.

If Yokomichi Hajime had a forceful personality like Higuchi Kyouya, he would have no doubt had his way with her upon arrival at their first fairy square. Against the practiced Warrior, Yukiko, who didn't even have the courage to shoot a monster with her ice magic, had no hope of resisting. Once Hajime felt like it, Yukiko would most definitely be violated.

Perhaps, she should just give up, accepting him could become a guarantee in its own right, she thought. It was as if Hajime was thinking he had become the protagonist in a shonen manga, and as a result, he was trying very hard to act cool in front of her. That was the scary part. There was no way of telling when he would attack, when his lust would overcome his reason. No, that time may not be far, that fate would surely befall her soon enough.

Her small hope would be if they could meet up with other classmates before then... But Yukiko couldn't honestly rely on that either. Looking at how Hajime was behaving, he might as well consider others as obstacles and remove them. Remove, or otherwise said, he could straight out murder them. Yukiko could quite easily imagine those classmates who ignored him having their heads lopped off by Hajime's blood-smeared greatsword.

She wanted to escape. She wanted release from the curse that was Yokomichi Hajime. But she couldn't help but be terrified of the hell that would surely come after.

"Please, someone... Anyone, save me..."

But this time, God didn't answer Yukiko's pleas.

And then, That time finally arrived.

“— Yukiko I’m, in lo-LaLuh-love with you, so”

After beating a particularly large red dog, one so called boss monster, they had teleported from the transfer circle in that room and arrived at a new fairy square. And upon arrival, suddenly, and without any rhyme or reason, a blood-soaked Hajime spoke those words.

“Eh...”

She had expected this. Yet, there was no way she could be prepared for it... Yukiko ending up desperately limiting her expression to only surprise.

“I Love you so... I’m d-doing it, Alright?”

Hajime takes hold of Yukiko’s small shoulders with his dirty, bloody hands.

“Hii!! NN-O...”

She couldn’t think. Hajime’s words of confession, these were in essence, a telling sign that he had reached the limits of his reason.

“I can do it right? RIGHT?”

Little by little, his grip on her shoulders tightened. It was painful.

“NO—”

Rather than physical pain, it was her mental agony that was being tested. Her life may be at risk, but she realized that she simply couldn’t let Hajime have his way with her.

It was possible that her pride as a woman had, just then, overcome her fear.

“—NOO!!”

Mustering strength in her slender arms, Yukiko pushed away at Hajime. Naturally, his already 100 kilogram mass, along with his newfound strength as a Warrior meant that Hajime’s body wouldn’t budge. Instead, Yukiko herself staggered, but succeeded in escaping from his hands.

“Eh, huh?... w-Why...”

Hajime stared dumbfounded at his hands that had been made to let go,

somehow utterly bewildered. Perhaps he never even dreamed that he would be rejected.

“I-I have... someone I, like...”

The phrase coming out of her mouth was of the most orthodox in rejecting a confession of love.

“huh, HAh!? You’re... kidding me”

“It’s true”

It was no lie. Nagae Yukiko being in love, was the unfiltered truth.

“N-no way, Souma—”

“It’s not Souma-kun”

“Then, it’s Tendou!?”

“No, not him either... I like, no well... I’m already, dating him”

“Wuh... What the hell... The Fuck are you on about, no Way, Who is it then!?”

“— Higuchi-kun”

That too, was no lie. In complete and utter truth, Nagae Yukiko loved Higuchi Kyouya, a boy of the same class, and furthermore, they were in a relationship.

“Ha, HahA... No, damn, way... That’s gotta be a lie, almost got me”

Hajime’s reaction would probably be the same as anyone in their class.

Nagae Yukiko, an unremarkable, plain, quiet girl. Higuchi Kyouya, if one doesn’t count exceptions like Souma Yuuto and Tendou Ryuichi, he would rank towards the top in class, and for better or worse, possessed a powerful character. If put in a school caste system, the boy and girl would no doubt be in completely separate levels.

In fact, the two had no point of intersection in their school lives. And there was no one claiming they saw them talking to each other in class either.

“I’m not lying, I really am in a relationship with Higuchi-kun”

“Lies! Lies, lies, there’s no damn way... You got no fucking Proof!”

“I have it”

Yukiko withdrew from her pocket, her smartphone that she had turned off upon her arrival at the dungeon. Her ghastly pale fingers softly opened a digital picture album.

“Here, this is a picture from our first date”

What was projected there was a scene that would be impossible to find in the 2-7 classroom. An image showing a joyful couple, Nagae Yukiko and Higuchi Kyouya, their bodies in close proximity.

It was likely a holiday, as they were both in their everyday clothes. Yukiko looked as plain as ever, while Kyouya stood out with his flashy silver accessories. Looking at them together, no one would think that they suited each other but, Yukiko’s shy, bashful expression, alongside Higuchi’s strangely giddy face made the two of them appear as though they were truly happy together.

“No way... Yukiko, with fucking Higuchi... With that fucking DQN...”

“Please don’t say that about Higuchi-kun (my boyfriend)”

“B-boyfriend... N-noh-NO fuckkin’ WAY! SHUT UP, that’s a Lie and you Know it. Me, you’re Messing with me, you just wanna Trick me, don’t You!?”

Suddenly shouting, Hajime snatched away Yukiko’s article of proof that was her phone.

“Ah, don’t—”

Hajime’s stubby, blackened fingers thus mercilessly disclosed the maiden’s hidden away memories. Indeed, Yukiko’s phone not only had that one picture of those two together, but had many other wonderful scenes together with her boyfriend preserved inside.

Things like the time when they first started going out, they were at a nearby shopping mall where they almost ran into the Souma siblings, and had to quickly hide away. Things like at the beach, at the pool, at the festival, all those summer vacation events that could be called cliche yet were utterly thrilling to do together with him.

And finally, like the time they first did the deed, her first, at some point in the summer.

“Ah, a...uaAAAA...”

Making a face of anguish as if he'd just seen something otherworldly levels of disgusting, Hajime groaned, and released the phone from sheer shock. The still lit screen showed the couple, in bed, naked, and holding each other close.

“wh-h-Hoh-WHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOORRRRE!!”

It was no different from a beast's roar. Hajime's sudden howl was easily overshadowing the recently defeated boss red dog's cry.

“youUUU, stiNKIN' WHOOORREE! T-thought you could Trick me, did yooOUUUUUUUUUUUU!”

“— Eis Shield!?”

As if he had transformed into an animal, he kept saying incomprehensible things while furiously charging at her... Which she just barely stopped with a shield of ice.

“Bugeh!?”

Having slammed face first into the bulky wall of ice, Hajime staggered and yelped like a frog being stomped on.

However, a Warrior's charge was no small force. Despite him bashing against the ice wall like an idiot, the thick ice had suffered a crack.

“ Eis Mist!”

She invoked her specialty without a moment's delay. From the beginning, Yukiko only had this to escape from monsters.

“Fuck! Oi, where'd you Go, where Are you, Yukikooo! I'll never forgive you, fucking bitch, acting all proper to Decieve ME, you putrid stinking Whore, try'na Honeytrap MEE!”

Along with the foul and hateful language, because she had become a mage, Yukiko could feel it. She could feel beyond the pure white mist, the presence of raging mana. Mana wasn't only the energy used to invoke spells, but also served as the source of the superhuman strength dwelling in a Warrior. This effect applied for humans and monsters alike.

This magical presence acted as a form of bloodlust, warning Yukiko of her greatest crisis yet. She had no choice but to escape, even if it meant leaving the safety of the fairy square.

“Hah... Hahh!”

She simply ran through the stone passages. Run, run as she may, the ever-encroaching voice never got far away. It was fortunate that Hajime never attained any speed enhancing, or as he called it, Mobility Boosting Skill, but since he had nigh inexhaustible stamina from his Toughness, loosing him proved difficult. Hajime was slow on his legs, but Yukiko wasn’t fast either. If she was a runner like Natsukawa Minami, she could have zipped away without trouble, but Yukiko was a genuine bookworm, and in addition, had a mage class. Running fast was asking too much of her.

“Hah... Hahh, Ah!?”

And ultimately, Yukiko’s luck had run out. At the end of a narrow alley-like stone path, she ended up... At a dead end.

“Bufuh... BuFuh... Yukikoo... Wait dammiit, yukikoOOOO”

Revenge. This is my revenge after having everything betray me, my rightful vengeance.

Nagae Yukiko. She made a big mistake betraying my pure love. I won’t forgive her, never, I won’t forgive you... Fuck, you fucking closet slut bitch. NTR is seriously shit, fucking terrible.

“— Fuuh, Fuh, Bueeh, oh, Oh HEY, It’s a Dead End”

At the end of a long passage, there was a dark, dreary, stone-built room. This dungeon has a ton of these things, rooms that don’t go anywhere. There’s no hidden doors or passages, and as long as no place is collapsed, it’d serve as a dead end.

In other words, me standing in front of this one entrance to the room means, Yukiko’s been perfectly cornered.

“Eheh, Yukikoo...”

This is for revenge, so Yukiko can’t complain no matter what I do. I can do

anything to her and it won't be my fault. Yukiko, my precious Yukiko, right now I have the right to do anything to you... That's right, anything.

"Y-Yukiko..."

I entered the room. In this dark, classroom-sized room, I quickly find Yukiko. She has nowhere left to run, so she's probably given up, and is huddled up in a corner.

The room's already murky as hell. I can barely see the corners but... Yukiko's fair, slender arms stand out in the minuscule amount of light.

"I-It's too Late to apologize ok... This is all your Fault... Y-you had the nerve to get a Boyfriend without telling Me... Worse still, it had to be fucking Higuchi... You're over, bitch!?"

I was at the peak of rage, and was about to pounce onto the seated down Yukiko when, I noticed. First, I picked up the smell. I've been getting very familiar with this scent these few days.

Then, I saw. The pool up blood spreading under Yukiko.

"Sh-she's dead..."

You're kidding... L-legit? Yukiko's legit, dead?

"H-how come..."

I don't get it. I have no idea, but I'm getting shivers. My legs were shaking but I edged closer to Yukiko even while staggering.

"Uahh, she's literally... dead"

Blood, was coming out of Yukiko's neck. It was still vividly pouring out. Must've stabbed it just recently.

There's a blood-stained knife in her right hand. This is the one I gave her as a gift for self defense, a relatively good quality goma knife. She stabbed this into her throat, no doubt.

And tightly gripped in her left hand was... a memo pad?

"Ah, Fuck this... Y-you really liked Higuchi that much more than me, fuuuck..."

On the memo pad, there were pictures of Yukiko and Higuchi kissing while

hugging, no, there was a heart drawn on the part where their lips touched, shitty photo booth (purikura) pics. Stuff like, ‘Yukiko, Kyouya, one year anniversary, we’ll be together forever <3’ was written down.

“Goddammit... Yukiko...”

I really loved you, you know. Why, how did it turn out this way. Strange, this is all out of whack.

I was supposed to make a harem in this parallel world, where I’d make only Yukiko my legal wife, and live every day happily... I was even sure it was destiny the moment I encountered her in the dungeon... This is all a lie. This just has to be a bad dream.

Actually, there’s no way Yukiko and Higuchi are going out. Yukiko’s the same as Yuki from The Melancholy of Suzuhara Haruka, she’s docile, and plain, but hella cute and—

“Y-Yukiko...”

Looks beautiful even though she’s dead. It’s like she’s just sleeping. If there wasn’t the stab on her neck and the pool of blood, I’d only think she was sleeping.

I’ve watched Yukiko’s sleeping face many times now. I’d been secretly watching when we rested at the fairy squares. I’m pretty good at holding back, if I do say so myself.

Like really, just looking at Yukiko’s lovely and defenseless figure, makes me...

“Ah”

Pop a boner. Look, even now, even when I know she’s dead... Crap, WTF, I’m fucking diamonds.

Hold up bro, what’s wrong with you. Yukiko’s dead for crying out loud. She ain’t sleeping man. She’s dead, meaning she ain’t waking up, ever. She won’t wake up no matter what, you, do...

“Uahh, Ah... She’s, still warm...”

I touched her. Yukiko’s peaceful face resting eternally, I stroked her fair cheek with a finger. It was astoundingly, warm.

"UOOH, oh man... This is, ahhh man..."

I hold her face with both hands. The texture of Yukiko's infinitely soft, warm cheeks transmit fully into my palms. It feels different from a doll (figurine). It feels like a woman.

"Hah, Hah... Yukiko... Yukikooh!"

I'm having my first kiss. There's this old line where it says it's supposed to taste like lemon but... The taste of Yukiko's lips, it was much more amazing.

"yumMMMMYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!!"

Holy-fucking-balls. Tasty. Seriously tasty. It's sweet like my mouth is melting, while bitter enough to make the tip of my tongue shiver in delight. The taste is all over the place, but every one of those flavors are stimulating, and all of them are satisfying. Simply delectable.

What literally is this? Do all girls taste like this? I wonder why, saliva isn't supposed to have any taste. But then, where's this irresistible taste coming fr—

"Ah, blood"

I got absorbed on the kiss, and made her lip area sloppy with my saliva. A tiny stream of blood exited from her half open mouth. Yeah well, she got stabbed in the throat so some blood coming out isn't all that strange.

But still, the red blood overlayed on Yukiko's porcelain white skin looks really vivid. Red on white, it's a simple 2 color combination, but if I think of it like Yukiko's blood on Yukiko's skin, it's kinda exciting. It's turning me on.

I can't tell whether it's in a sexual meaning or an appetizing one. But one thing's for sure— She looks delicious.

"!?"

I lick it, the blood coming from her mouth. With that, I understand.

Ahh, it's this, this is it. That explosively delectable flavor I tasted, it was the taste of blood.

"Y-YukiKOH—"

About what happened after, it was like seeing a dream, my consciousness was

hazy. But the event was distinctly left in my mind. It was my glorious, first time.

It started with a kiss. I fully indulged myself in the taste of her lips and tongue — bite, munch—Yukiko’s mouth and tongue are so small, I could eat them up with one bite.

“Hah, hah...”

Next came her chest. If you’re any sort of man, boobs are life. Like pealing the skin off a peach, I impatiently took off Yukiko’s sailor uniform— rip, tear— Her modest breasts white as snow— crunch!! You’re beautiful, Yukiko.

“Fuhah, buhaAAA...”

Well it’s rude to the girl if you only focus on her breasts. I’m a guy who’ll love every nook and cranny of his woman— chomp, chomp — One at a time, with great care, I partook in every morsel of Yukiko’s body allowing not a single leftover. But look, there comes a point where a man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do.

“Bufuh, fuh, fuh...”

The moment I laid eyes on her underwear, pure white, perfectly reflecting Yukiko’s prim and proper image— smash.

“BuruooOOOOOOOOooh!!”

I feasted on Yukiko, deliriously, ignoring all else, I devoured this woman’s whole body.

This wasn’t like the sexual catharsis of ejaculation. This satisfaction wasn’t something you can get with simple sex. Domination? Conquest? Monopolizing?

Nope, all wrong. This has to be what they call ‘love.’

I love Yukiko. And She loves me. That’s why it’s so tasty, that’s why it feels so good. I couldn’t think of any other reason.

This clearly meant that Yukiko was always, only mine. Yukiko is only mine. And now, the two of us had become one. I’m so relieved, no more worries now. I’m not letting that fucking Higuchi touch a hair on her body. That bastard will never touch my Yukiko.

Ahh, love, love is such a wonderful thing.

“—Bufuh, BURRRPP!”

After relishing in my love, what came up from deep in my stomach was a big ol’ belch with a bit of red haze mixed in. Maybe cause I’m stuffed, I suddenly feel really sleepy.

I mean, obviously you’re gonna sleep after you have a go at it. I placed my heated body on the chilly floor to cool myself down, and lied down with my hands and feed sprawled out.

There was nothing around me. There was no one else here, not anymore.

Since, Yukiko and me, we’d already become one.

As I basked in the afterglow of having eternally bonded to Yukiko, I fell asleep in the greatest mood ever.

“Feast”

Which would mean, what I’m hearing now is in a dream.

“Feast, Feast”

Someone was talking. More like, shut up already, it was more like a howling beast? What I’m hearing is just howling, but I somehow understand what it’s saying.

“Feast to your heart’s content, quench your thirst”

I could see a dim figure of the howling beast, maybe. What is that? A lion, no, wolf? Maybe a pig? I don’t get it. But it’s big. It was a huge, black beast.

“Welcome, kinling of mine, welcome— Cannibalizer”

Kinling Cannibalizer

Evil Eater: Feast on all things. Meat, bone, poison, magic, and occasionally, even on skills, you can feast on all.

Great Maw: For feasting on all things, a monstrous mouth, and a gigantic jaw.

Bottomless Stomach: For all things feasted on, a gargantuan gut.

Predated Skill(s)

Nagae Yukiko's Ice Magic: Reproduce a part of lower grade ice magic.

There's this bizarre feeling of stuff vigorously entering my head. It's not a very good feeling, but, never mind that, I just wanna sleep.

I forgot about that vague image of a beast, and this time, peacefully, fell asleep.

Chapter 60: Butterfly

Hot damn, look what time it is! It's time to get another totally awesome power from my patron god. That thought came when I realized I was once again in that same old black dimension.

"I shall grant you a new Protection"

"Yes, thank you very much, Ruinhilde-sama!"

So if you can, please spare me the pain! Thinking this was also a same old repetition.

"Chaos. It is not a thing that merely exists as phenomena"

Ah, he's started another one of those incomprehensible God lectures again. To be perfectly honest, even if he goes all deep and profound on me when he's giving me a new Protection, all I care about is if it's gonna hurt or not, so none of the talk is actually entering my head, you know?

But well, I'll try hearing him out as best as I can. I hope he's OK with that.

"Put two people together, and they're either friends and foes. With three, one vies to take a position of neutrality, or even opportune for the winning side. The situation complicates as you add more. In other words, chaos ensues"

Ruinhlde-sama grandly spread out his arms, as he spoke deeply on the nature of chaos. And out of nowhere, brilliant lights burst forth. From every conceivable direction, the lights danced like a storm of cherry blossoms.

Red, blue, yellow, green. These lights flickered in a myriad of colors— no, not quite. They were butterflies. With black-lined wings like those of the black swallowtail, these critters flapped about each with their own color. Hundreds, thousands of these glittering butterflies were dancing and, I see, this really is an illusory scene worthy of being called a miracle of God.

"Mine devotee, Momokawa Kotarou. As you are still of mortal flesh, take time in dipping deep into chaos. Lose yourself, be immersed, and set yourself adrift, if not... Hmm, at any rate, you did well"

“I, I see... wai-, Buwah!?”

As I wondered if what this god was saying is that I’m very praiseworthy, the gathered butterflies in the darkness rushed towards me all at once. A-Are you stupid, do I look like a flower with delicious nectars inside! I didn’t think so!

“Uh, Uuh, FuwaaaAAAAAAA—”

Swallowed into the storm of butterflies, I Log Out from the God Area.

Contra-beat Butterfly: Using medicines, create a butterfly that releases the opposite effect with it’s scales.

With this new curse in hand, the Worst Harem Party, with me inaugurated as its sub-leader, entered once again into the dungeon.

It need not be said that the atmosphere surrounding us was really bad. None of us showed it on our faces, but none could deny that the air was dangerously close to its boiling point.

Nevertheless, our progress itself was going alright. It’s because Class Rep, who I myself believed to be a good leader, took her position seriously, so we were able to fight as a team somewhat OK. There were a few places where her decisions felt a bit off, but they weren’t anything big, so I generally went with it.

If we could survive thanks to her orders, then I had no qualms. The only time I did speak up would be when we encountered enemies that were actually life-threatening.

Right, for example, like that powerful Mantis from before— The Note Circle has since updated to let us know that it’s known as a Knight Mantis— and like that time when 2 of those appeared at once.

“Class Rep, let’s get Mei-chan up front”

“But then, the rearguard—”

“Give me some ice walls after my bog sets in. There’s two of those Mantises this time, so if we don’t go full power here, we might regret it”

“Kotarou-kun, everything alright?”

“It’s fine, the last junction was a few hundred meters back. Even if we get

Ants from behind, we can buy time with the bog and ice. If you guys can take out even one of those Mantises in that time, we'll win easy."

"Got it, then, I'll be right back!"

Leaving behind a bright smile, Mei-chan became a gale as she rushed off to battle up ahead.

As of currently, our usual formation had Kenzaki + Natsukawa in vanguard, Class Rep and Souma Sakura in the middle, with me, Takanashi, and finally, Mei-chan protecting the rear. To speak of what's different from before, we've got a solid mid-guard with our mage combo, Class Rep + Souma Sakura, so it's a step in the right direction I'd say. Also, we've had Mei-chan stationed with us, so the defense back here has improved too.

All of these changes were things I suggested before heading out. Class Rep asked a few questions about my rationale, but otherwise accepted right away after I answered.

It was a tough decision taking Mei-chan away from the front, but in the dungeon, there's always the danger of a pincer attack. At any rate, it was necessary to put more strength into our rearguard. Plus, taking into account the current circumstances between Mei-chan and Kenzaki... Anyway, Kenzaki'll fight better if we put her only with Natsukawa-san. This also takes into account that we need to put her Dualwielder skills to full use.

"Rotten Bog— and done. Alright Class Rep, Kenzaki-san and Natsukawa-san will take on one of the Mantises, you and Souma-san provide spell support with all you got. Me and Mei-chan will stop the other one"

"Can you two handle it?"

"We can slow it down. In that time, you guys have to beat yours quick!"

"... You don't, need to tell us"

"Got'cha!"

Souma Sakura behaved outwardly annoyed, but anyway, Natsukawa-san gave out an earnest reply. Kenzaki-san didn't say anything, but she probably understands the plan.

“That’s how it is, so Kenzaki-san, don’t be late okay?”

“O-of course... Just, leave it to me...”

Facing the Mantises, Mei-chan who was shoehorned into the vanguard, spoke to Kenzaki with a smile. To which the latter replied with a shakey voice. Yup, we definitely can’t put her and Mei-chan together any time soon.

Aside from that, considering everyone’s feelings on the matter, it’d be much better to split the work between me and Mei-chan, and the Souma team.

“— Guys, they’re here!!”

Natsukawa-san who possessed the Thief’s enhanced hearing, clearly deciphered the position of the Mantises by the beat of their wings echoing inside the cave and announced that their arrival was upon us. It’s because we had her excellent perception that I could hand out orders and even had spare time to explain the strategy.

Now, all that’s left was the fight itself. With our current collective strength, we should be able to take on 2 Mantises at the same time. It’s a good chance, I’ll test our my new curse magic here too.

“ Lux Sagitta ”

“ Eis Sagitta ”

As expected, the two Mantises came flying from beyond the curve ahead, and our mid-field mages got the first attack in. And no, they weren’t so stupid as to try and aim at both, and properly targeted only one, the one on the right, let’s name this one Mantis A. Arrows of light and ice blitzed towards it.

But this enemy wasn’t half-baked. Sharply swinging its 2 scythes, Mantis A deflected their preemptive attack.

Seeing which of them the mages chose, Kenzaki-san and Natsukawa-san now knew their mark. Leaving A to those 4, me and Mei-chan started on containing Mantis B.

“ Red Fever, Blackhair Bind!!”

I set Red Fever on A and B, just because, and extended my good old tentacles towards B.

“— SHAA!”

With a piercing cry, the braided tentacles, that were aimed for its 4 legs, were quickly scythed off. That being said, when you’re on Mei-chan’s level, even something like that worked as good support.

“Ha!!”

With a spirited yell, she swung down her Roaring Steel Halberd. Mantis B instantly drew back its scythes and received the large ax-blade.

And stopped it. But, though slightly, the Mantis was indeed pushed back.

“Woah, Mei-chan’s incredible...”

She bested a monster in pure strength. That Mei-chan, it’s like she was getting EXP every time she defeated an enemy and was levelling up when before I know it.

Though I’m jelly of her Status values that seemed to be rising so well, I’ll get back to what I need to be doing. I mean, I’m just a Shaman. The best I can do is maybe harass the enemy when we’re in a fight.

“Soar, oh wings of misfortune, rooted in this—”

Reciting the aria engraved in my head, I take out my, practically useless since I never actually use it, antidote med. The usual ointment A is made of white blossoms(white flower), with small amounts of shamdelion(false dandelion), and fairy walnut leaf. This antidote here is made with the blueflower as a base, adding similar portions of shamdelion and walnut leaves.

Who knows what kind of poisons this thing will work on. I can’t really tell since Intuition Pharmacy only gave me a rough explanation. But whatever it is, it’s definitely an antidote of some kind, no doubt.

Implying that, this,

using medicines, create a butterfly that releases the opposite effect with it’s scales

, effect of my new curse will allow me to take this and manifest a butterfly carrying the poison it’s supposed to cure.

“—Contra-beat Butterfly”

In the next moment, the pasty antidote reformed into swallowtail butterflies with a blue luminescence. They each gently fluttered up from the palm of my hand. I wonder if their number depends on the amount of meds used. The blue, poisonous butterflies rose from my hand until there were 10, which is when all the antidote had been expended.

“Nice, now go!”

I try commanding them like I do Rem, and the poison butterflies start heading for the target just how I picture them to. Granted, they’re going at a butterfly’s pace, so it’s quite honestly not fast. But having the ability to move freely in the air, they should be able to collide into the goal.

This goal that is Mantis B was presently in fierce combat with Mei-chan. With its big, compound eyes, there’s no way it’d miss my blue glowies. But as if implying it sensed absolutely no harm from them, the Mantis showed no signs of trying to avoid or drive away my butterflies.

Making sure not to accidentally hit Mei-chan, I go around from behind and—
Bullseye.

Upon landing on the Mantis’ back, the butterflies, as if remembering that they were beings of curse mana, dispersed into blue phosphorescence. These blue-white glowy things must be their poisonous scales.

“Tch, it’s not instant effect”

All shots were on target. However, Mantis B showed no changes at all.

“That was useless, using blackhair would have been—”

“Not at all. Look, this Mantis is getting weaker!”

Yah! She yelled, swinging down her halberd once more. She beat back the Mantis even more than she had in her first attack.

“And it’s reactions, are also— dull!!”

And another one. The upswing from her weapon cut off Mantis’ right hand scythe from the base and sent it flying.

The bug was a good match for Mei-chan using both its scythes in unison. Take away even one of those, and the fight was practically over.

“So believe me when I say, your poison really worked. Thank you Kotaoru-kun, it was a great help”

Following the same swing that cut off its arm, she sliced off its left frontal leg. Its posture now broken, what remained was for it to be chopped up like a cucumber, its pieces finally sinking into a pool of its own green blood. With that as a background, Mei-chan gave me a delighted grin as she praised the efficacy of my poison butterflies.

Honestly, I seriously don't feel like being praised at all. Any way you look at it, what I did only slightly weakened the creature. Mei-chan's the awesome one for turning it into absolute mincemeat.

Wait, is the Souma team still fighting over there...

“Fuuh, we beat it somehow”

30 seconds after Mei-chan was done, Mantis A, after being pin-cushioned by light and ice arrows, and hacked into by the dual weapon users, fell defeated.

Seeing how their side was one upped by Mei-chan, Kenzaki-san was making glances at her with eyes that looked afraid.

With my meds and Souma Sakura's healing magic, her absolutely devastated face was already fixed. When she later opened her eyes, Class Rep took the lead and explained everything. Now, It was like her headstrongness was all a lie, and she listened without a single complaint.

But seeing her like that, no one, not even Mei-chan, said anything. Or rather, they wouldn't pry in.

I think everyone's already fully aware. That Kenzaki Asuna's heart, that proud girl's heart, was torn down by the overwhelming violence of the Berserker.

And now, Kenzaki-san was listening to not only Mei-chan, but even my own orders. This would've been unthinkable for the old her. Should I call it progress, or maybe regression... Whatever it is, it's convenient for me.

And so, Souma Sakura was the only person left in the list of people trying to

get in my hair.

I should just get Mei-chan to beat her up too, make life easier... Is the kind of evil thought popping into my head, but I'm not stupid enough not to consider the consequences. Otherwise, soon, when we meet back up with Souma Yuuto, it'll be all over. If I act that straightforwardly evil, I won't live long.

Chapter 61: Prior Visitor

“—Why in the world is this cave so long”

Said Class Rep in a somewhat fed up tone.

After that double Mantis battle, we’ve been going through insect cave after stone dungeon after insect cave. We’ve gotten pretty used to fighting in the caves, but well... As Class Rep just complained about, the one we’re in right now feels like it’s been going for ages.

“This is sort of like, we’ll be meeting a boss soon”

“We could... A giant spider, the Rook Spider was it?”

For some reason, the cave monster series seems to be prefixed with chess vocabulary. The Ants are Pawn Ant, Mantis being Knight, and the spider type monster is designated Rook. This was all from updates on our notebooks. So obviously, there’s gonna be the Bishop, Queen, and King types... But I don’t want to meet them if possible. We didn’t get any info on those, so I’ll be praying that they don’t live in this part of the dungeon.

“— Uwah, spider nests! Ryouko-chan look, it’s gotta be heree!”

Natsukawa-san, who was walking ahead, let us know that our suspicions had come to fruition. As I mustered my courage and caught up to her, there, as expected, I could see a giant spider’s nest.

The grandness of the area was very telling of its status as a boss room. Despite being an underground passage dug out by the Ants, it had swelled into an atrium so large, you couldn’t see the ceiling. The place had enough breadth and height that the light elemental’s brightness didn’t reach very far at all.

We could see dozens of spider webs lined along the walls of this giant pit. No doubt, there’s going to be a Spider here. And it’s going to be stupidly large enough to match up with its nest.

“Rep”

“I know Momokawa-kun. Alright everyone, if this Rook Spider boss really does

come out, you know the plan”

So she says, but it’s really nothing special.

The spider webbing is likely very tough, but that’s where our flame imbued weapons come in. Kenzaki-san and Natsukawa-san have, respectively, their Red Saber and Red Knife, so they can handle it. Mei-chan’s the only one without any attribute imbued arms, but with Souma Sakura’s Holy Enchant, she should be able to compensate.

The rook represents a castle, or perhaps a tank in modern terms, so I’m expecting the spider to be much larger than the Mantis that was only a ‘knight’. Our magic arrows didn’t do much to the Mantis, so the Spider, which may as well have a harder exoskeleton will be even more resilient to offensive spells.

Basically, we’re having all 3 of our fighters go in, with the mid-guard protecting those front-liners by barraging the creature with spells. Meanwhile, if we get any stray Ants coming in, me and Takanashi-san in the rear-line will have to manage the situation. Fundamentally, we don’t let the vanguard get distracted.

If the Spider happens to be unreasonably tough-shelled, or if it starts bringing Mantises into the fight, we retreat. period.

“Now, let’s do this, people. Sakura, anytime”

“OK— Summon Lux Elemental”

Souma Sakura created a fairy of light one magnitude brighter than the ones we’ve been using up until now, and released it into the chamber.

This fairy, that looked like a basketball sized bulb of light, lit up a much wider range, and after confirming that there was nothing suspicious on the ground, we entered the pit.

“I have the feeling the Spider might come down from the webs on the ceiling, be caref—”

Class Rep was in the middle of cautioning us when,

THUDD! A heavy impact grasped our ears.

“Uwah! Isn’t this too fast!?”

There, was the arachnid monster that left no doubt in mind about its identity being the Rook Spider itself. Its exoskeleton was gray and spiky like an Armor Bear's, and its 8 legs and giant abdomen were covered in red hair. Quite the toxic color palette. I could imagine that just touching those hairs could inflict paralysis.

Huge, brutal-looking mandibles that could eat a person whole lined its mouth, and those 8 crimson eyes were looking— Wait, what the, there's no life in its eyes.

I mean, yeah, bug eyes always look lifeless, but Pawn Ants and Knight Mantises had eyes with a gleam to them. Enough that you could see them looking at you in pitch darkness. But that feature, was clearly lacking here.

“... Is it dead?”

After calming down a bit, that statement turned out to be fact. The Rook Spider had all its 8 legs sprawled out and its body was planted on the floor. Not a twitch from the tip of its legs to the edge of its mandibles.

Wasn't it supposed to get the jump on us by swooping down from above? How come its dead?

No rather, who actually killed this thing?

“—BuFuh—, the hell, who turned on the damn lights?”

It was a voice. Not a sound let out by a monstrous spider, but no doubt, a man's voice in the Japanese tongue. No actually, I had a good idea whose voice that was.

“W-wait... Yokomichi-kun?”

“Bufuh, the shit man, looks like company's finally here!”

Creeping up the Spider's back, the guy jumped down full of energy, landing in front of us with an impactful thud.

There's no mistaking it, it was Yokomichi Hajime.

“Hii!?”

Yelped Takanashi-san from behind me as if feeling a repulsion on an

instinctive level. But setting her, who wasn't so strong willed to begin with, aside, I'm willing to bet Souma Sakura and Class Rep were having reactions not very dissimilar.

Nicknamed Porky, this guy was unanimously hated in class 2-7... Naturally, I too shared the sentiment as I too had gotten heated up with him at some point. This guy that literally everyone hates, this filthy otaku-type asshole, Yokomichi Hajime, had landed down before us. His mere appearance was enough to warrant screaming from girls.

Just look at him, this guy's supposed to be wearing the same uniform (Gakuran) as me, but his looks so filthy. I swear, he's never even looked for the soap fruit before has he? His clothes were absolutely soaked in third party blood, and he's been going with it.

And he stinks. Bad.

"Oh, OH, UOOOOOOOOOOOO! Holy fucking, Jackpot! Souma Sakura, Kenzaki, Class Rep... Oioi man, it's all the Hottest Chicks all lined up!!"

For some bizarre reason, Yokomichi started laughing like a dog. He was pointing and laughing like he was having the time of his life.

Scary.

Honestly, it's scary. No one, could say, anything. Even Class Rep, our responsible leader, had her expression frozen stiff. And seeing him buffawing like a buffoon, even I, as sub-leader, I wanted to do something here, but my body just wouldn't move.

I was even thinking that fighting the Rook Spider would've been an improvement for my mental state.

Faced with a situation this far off our anticipations, we could only stand there, planted like trees.

"Great, it's fucking Great, now this is what I call Fate! Bufufuh, lets see, we got our Busty loli, Takanashi Kotori, the bubbly Natsukawa Minami and— Good lord, oi, who the fuck is she!? Those tits!! Even ginormous is an understatement!?"

Takanashi-san was quivering and had taken me as shield as she does. Yeah, completely justified this time. Natsukawa-san was also shivering like she'd been doused in cold water.

On the other hand, even while receiving such frank vulgarities from Yokomichi, Mei-chan held onto her halberd like she wasn't even fazed. God she's handsome.

Looking at Mei-chan back in front of me, getting ready to trash him, I got a few of my marbles back together.

That's right. He may be the infamous Yokomichi Hajime... But he's still just a guy from class. Before things get bloody, we should try and establish communication.

While the rest of the girls kept doing their tree impressions, I stepped out front.

"H-hey Yokomichi-kun, did you, umm, beat this Spider by yourself?"

"The who!? Oh it's Momokawa. Filthy Casual Momokawa! Kaah! Do you Think I need a dude in this situation? Have some damn common Sense. Like seriously, traps are still gay, dammit!"

Fuck, I hate myself for actually understanding what he just said.

"Yokomichi-kun, just, calm down a bit, I just want to talk"

"Talk? I seem to remember Every one of You trying not so much as to even Look at me before, and what, Now you want to talk? Isn't that a BIT FUCKING HYPOCRITICAL!"

Yeah we ostracized you, and you deserved every second of it. Not that I'd voice that.

"But see, we're in a real state of emergency here, so let's work together and ___"

"BUHAHAH! State of Emergency! Found ourselves in a Pinch have we? Fuck off Momokawa, you're just a Background character"

"... It's true that the powers I got aren't anything to write home about, But the risk of death is the same for every one of us"

"Like hell it is! I'm the MC here! Look at this, Main Character right here. I quit life (IRL) cause it sucks balls, and came to another world to become a Slave Harem holding, Cheat Power using ultimate Badass. I came here to rise up from nothing to the Strongest, just like in those template fantasy stories. And you what, I've Already done it!"

I'll mention this a second time. I'm in serious cringe from comprehension.

The others were looking at Yokomichi like he was some gone-off-the-deep-end, drugged up, mental case, screeching and flailing in the middle of traffic.

Relax, me. The only one here with the ability to decrypt Yokomichi's incoherent and incomprehensible howling is the only one who has the same otaku knowledge as him. That is, me. Right now, I gotta put real effort in translating him, to keep him talking, and most importantly, to get some info out of him.

"Yeahh so, Yokomichi-kun, I'm guessing you got a seriously powerful Job?"

He isn't the kind of happy-go-lucky guy to be thinking that just being transported into an isekai is enough to get him a cheat power, that he'd get to live the hero life as if the difficulty of the world is set to 'very easy'. The only reason Yokomichi's been putting up this bizarre tough-guy act, has to be because he's gotten himself enough power to make him think he is one.

No well, if I'd gotten Mei-chan level offensive prowess from the outset, I'd be one punching the shit out of that Armor Bear with my Pile Bunker, and might've also thought, 'Hell to the isekai cheats yes!'

"Bufuh, Bufufuh! Wanna know, Momokawa? Ya reeeeeally wanna know!?"

Yokomichi was wriggling around being uselessly happy. This fat, dirty otaku squirming by himself looked so repulsive that, even as a guy, I'm almost ready to throw up. It's to the level of making the insect residents of this cave look pure and untarnished.

"Tell me, Momokawa, what do you think of when you hear the word, Strongest?"

Yokomichi asked me as if he wised up all of a sudden.

"Like, having the best powers, right? For example... being able to create or destroy universes, something like a god, I guess"

"Oh, not bad, pretty Good answer. Like a god huh, I guess That works too"

'Yup, not bad', he nodded to himself, and then came back at me with a counter for no reason.

"But think a bit, Little man, stuff like World Creation, BUfuh, that's like, Way too OP to be Fun. Wake up and you're a God, is like, nope"

"Yeah, I don't really think we can ever get to something like that with a Job either"

"Might be impossible, for small-fry mobs like You, that is. But me... Bufufuh, I might just get there man, Godhood"

No dude, it's impossible, what are you on?

"Me, when I think strongest, I think Potential "

"Potential? Like, to do anything?"

"Ya got it! It's one of those Growth Cheat varieties, ya'know? Like being able to do stuff you couldn't do before. Stuff I can't do, I can just steal—"

Grin, he grinned with his disgusting face, smiling as if to show off his proud collection.

"NO WAY!"

"Call it Skill Eater. Me, I can plunder the Powers (Skills) of anything I Eat— Like this!"

Yokomichi opened his mouth wide, and in the next instant, spat out a white something super fast.

"Buwah, wh-what's... webs, from the Rook Spider!?"

Webbing in thick bundles had me bound. My arm with the spear, both my legs, and the area around my waist all had white sticky threads coiled around.

"This guy's meat was pretty tasteless, but not half bad. And the thread looks like it's working good, nice, the Spider was a hit"

“Kotarou-kun!”

“Hold it, Mei-chan!”

Looking at Yokomichi pointing and laughing at me after binding me in spider webs, Mei-chan was about to jump him in a fit of rage, but I stopped her.

Not yet. I can still avoid a bloodbath. We shouldn’t fight yet.

Because he’s a classmate? Not quite. It’s more because, this guy can steal powers.

“Y-you’re pretty amazing, Yokomichi-kun”

“Always was”

Seeing as Yokomichi didn’t proceed to cut me down with that greatsword he’s carrying, which I assumed was his weapon, I can assume that for him, this must be like a light joke and/or a demonstration of his power.

No well, normally, if you’re getting yourself covered in disgusting webs regurgitated out by an ugly bastard, you could easily imagine yourself suddenly a target.

“Yeah, and I was hoping someone with amazing powers like you could use it to protect everyone”

“Buheheh, yeah, protect, I’ll protect ‘em alright, I mean, isn’t that what MCs do?”

So I’m not a target, maybe, hopefully?

At a glance, Yokomichi Hajime seemed like the type of guy with a lot of admiration for one of those light novel protagonists who seems to be loved by everyone around him, especially a collection of cute girls, who he proceeds to woo and who fight over which of them gets to be with him. One may judge Yokomichi to be an idiot who can’t distinguish fantasy from reality. But in a way, this guy’s similar to me, in the sense that he too was a member of class 2-7. And he too saw that everyday scene.

That scene, consisting of the perfection that is Souma Yuuto.

Even I, fully aware of my place in the class caste, had often found myself

feeling a spark of envy at those scenes. Yokomichi was tough, tough in a different meaning from Higuchi. Even when he knew we was being ignored and even shunned by the whole class, he would always talk down to people, and generally considered them plebs. Him calling me a "filthy casual" of an otaku and looking down on me because of that, would be him expressing that personality of his.

Anyway, he may be a huge pain in the ass, but if he says he'll fight along with us, I don't think taking him along is a bad idea. No actually, rather than getting hostile now and having this sort of guy coming after us, we should bear with it, and get him to be friendly.

"That's great to hear. Right now, we're not just aiming for the Divine Gate but also a way to get all of us out of this place. So honestly, we'll need all the help we can get"

"Hmm, yeahh but, to be Real here, I don't need any Other dudes around, you know... But, I guess I'll need someone to show off my greatest harem to! So yeah, Momokawa, you'll get the role of 'friend', in eroge terms"

"Gee, thanks"

"One more thing, I'm killing Higuchi"

"That, I'm down for, I'll even help you out"

"Oh, nice man, you totally get me, Momokawa"

Am I supposed to feel good here? Looks like the deal's set on Yokomichi Hajime joining our party.

If not for the fact that, this asshole who's already the subject of nausea for every girl had become high on the fact that he'd gotten a dreamlike power like Skill Eater. And letting completely loose, he let his raw desires flow out in a barrage of heinous statements just now. Yeah, I don't wanna have him anywhere near me either.

But no matter what my feelings on the matter are, the situation wasn't getting any better. I had no idea how many skills he's got eaten up. No, looking from where he defeated the Rook Spider all by himself, he might just have enough power to take us all on by himself.

Which would mean, making him an enemy was synonymous to suicide. And if it ever came down to that, I'd much rather have Souma Yuuto and Tendou Ryuichi on our side to fend him off. If it was those two, I had no doubt they could hold us together.

"Ok, so I take it that you'll be working with us then?"

"Oi oi, you guys're the ones begging me to protect you, right? That means, all of You gotta lower your heads to Me, and make a Proper request"

I take a peek behind. First, let's see what the leader, what Class Rep says.

Swallowing hard after witnessing my negotiations with Yokomichi, she had quite the pale face... But in reality, she did seem to have a grasp of the situation, and though reluctantly, she gave me a nod.

In contrast to her, Souma Sakura was glaring at Yokomichi like she was harboring intense disgust. Her wariness of him was at MAX. Well, I guess I can concede that as being an obvious reaction from a girl. Mei-chan and Kenzaki were pretty much doing the same. And, looking absolutely freaked out was Natsukawa-san, who ironically seemed the most cute and girly of the bunch.

That reminds me, what about Takanashi-san, who's supposed to be the most terrified of them all—

"N-No! NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!"

The moment I looked at Takanashi-san, she exploded in tears, and screamed like no tomorrow.

Chapter 62: The Cannibal Hungers (1)

“Wai-, what are y-, Kotori!?”

Guess she reached her limit. This was the frank impression I had seeing Takanashi-san cry out in fear and latch onto Class Rep who happened to be nearby.

This is bad. This might as well mean that negotiations have broken down... No, I can't let it. These girls may hate it from their very core, but starting with Takanashi-san, I have to get all the girls here to bear with th—

“Run! We have to run now! He'll eat Kotori, he'll eat everyone!”

“... Eh?”

It didn't click for a moment— But then I got it, I understood what Takanashi-san was trying to say. I understood it, all too well.

Yokomichi Hajime had Skill Eater. From the way he spat out the Rook Spider's webbing, to the fact that he himself declared to have feasted on its meat. From just these 2 observations, I could naturally deduce that this Skill Eater of his allows him to plunder the powers of the monsters he eats.

It's a common trope. I've seen many a story where the absolute weakest of protagonists grow stronger and stronger by eating. Starting off with stuff like a slime, or goblin or horned rabbit, you see them gaining their powers and grow (cheat) their way to peerlessness.

But there's another thought. The terrifying thought that, does this voracious form of skill stealing target only monsters?

“Kotori, his Job! What is his, what is Yokomichi Hajime's Job!”

Shouted Souma Sakura. Before I could even react, she was urging Takanashi-san for an answer.

“He's a Cannibalizer! And he already, ate, Nagae-san!”

Hearing the answer, I was shocked, jolted with much greater trepidation than when I witnessed that nameless girl being eaten by goma.

Goma were monsters, hideous as the sky is blue. Not humans, monsters. That's why them trying to eat humans could be considered reasonable behavior.

But a fellow human doing the same, that—

“Lux Sagitta!!”

And before I noticed, a light arrow had pierced itself right at Yokomichi’s feet.

“Yokomichi-kun, that was a warning. We don’t want to have to kill you. So please quietly, go back. And do not, come near us, ever again”

“... Haa?”

Yokomichi reacted as if flabbergasted. It’s vexing, but for once, I’m in complete agreement with the younger Souma.

There’s no way I’m so dense as to not see the meaning behind Souma Sakura’s warning.

I’m suspecting that Kotori-san just took a peek at Yokomichi’s Status info by some skill or Job ability of hers that they’d kept hidden from me. And although there’s the matter of my shock upon learning of this hidden Sage skill, let’s not get sidetracked.

She mentioned Nagae-san, in other words, the girl belonging to the same literature club as me, Nagae Yukiko. And we just learned that he ate her, in other words, he killed and feasted on her.

There’s accepting one’s shortcomings, and then there’s trying to team up with a literal crazed cannibal, the latter of which, I’ll have to decline. Personally speaking, after becoming aware of this fact... No, even if it’s some kind of misunderstanding, as long as there’s the smallest chance of it being true, I will firmly oppose joining hands with Yokomichi.

But seriously, Souma Sakura, it’s like you’re looking to start something.

“What, the, Fuck is with that Attitude? And just when I said I’d Protect your Sorry asses”

“I have nothing more to say, to a murderer like you. Turn back and leave, right now. Or else—”

Bitch was off her kilter, I thought, despite not being her target. How the hell did she go from 0 to 100% intensity so quick. She was completely underestimating, no, she was misjudging Yokomichi's strength.

Meaning that, she'd categorized him as someone that we must drive away, no questions asked.

Ah, goddammit, this stupid bitch. All my oiling up on Yokomichi from just now, it's like that shit went completely over her head.

I'm certain of it. That, if we fight Yokomichi Hajime, if we engage with this Cannibalizer, there's a huge risk of us losing someone. So if we were going to fight anyway, rather than something half-assed like a warning shot, she should have shot him dead with him never realizing.

Thanks to Souma Sakura's unneeded warning, we'd now lost our important chance at a surprise attack.

“— Shut Your trAp, fucking wHore! If you’d oNly been Quiet like YuKiko, I’d’ve given yoU SO much LOVing y’knOW!”

As expected, Yokomichi was riled. He'd blown his top. Negotiations were already in smithereens.

I'd better get ready. There's no going back from this.

“DO IT! MEI-CHAN!”

Along with my yell, blew a fierce gale.

No, this wasn't mere wind. It was the figure of Mei-chan swinging up her Halberd as she passed me in an instant.

“ Blackhair Bind!!”

I sic all the blackhair tentacles I could muster towards Yokomichi, almost as if getting him back for the webs.

He didn't know about my powers at all. That went double for Mei-chan's strength. Tentacle binds plus a Berserker's full swing combo, not something you can handle so easily.

I did feel a hint of guilt. Killing him, Yokomichi, a classmate, and a human

being. It was definitely an attempt of murder. I felt the guilt of making Mei-chan do that.

No I don't think Mei-chan, despite herself, could actually commit murder without feeling a thing. She's got to be aiming to lop off an arm or something.

She is, right? But she was clearly swinging down right on top of his head... Crap, is he dead?

“— Whatthe!? You try’na KiLL me, OI! MomokaWAA, fucking bEtrayed me, did’ja, baStard!?”

Yokomichi moved at speeds imperceptible to my eyes, drew out the greatsword on his back, and successfully received the headsplitter from above. Tch, he's changed gears to fighting mode already, Yokomichi's reaction speed was fierce.

But the weird shit didn't end there... What, is with his arms? He had blades coming out of his elbows. I recognized those, they're definitely Knight Mantis scythes. After quickly shredding my blackhair, he used his, now free, hands to defend against Mei-chan's attack.

So this, is the power of Skill Eater. What growth cheat, what skill master, he's just a damn monster.

“Momokawa-kun, Futaba-san! How could you! Are you planning to commit murder!”

“Bitch, just shut up! It's all cause of you that we're in this mess— Contra-beat Butterfly!!”

This is unbelievable. Here we are taking on the grave responsibility of literal manslaughter and Souma Sakura's still acting all holier than thou. So I argued back almost by reflex while letting fly my new curse magic of poison butterflies whose effectiveness was still vague.

Mei-chan and Yokomichi had already entered combat status. But it looks like the Mantis Blades were in the way, so they were gone from his elbows at some point.

Still, this bastard's actually able to hold his own against Mei-chan in a match

of blades, he's got to be pretty good with swords. This Porky was being a real pain in the ass.

But while he's busy with that, I call up Rem to cut away my web bindings with her knife. I can finally move.

"Ghh, Va, Fucking azzholes, you bitches wanNa Go! Then I'll sHow you go, damN stinkin' whoRes"

Still locking blades, Yokomichi made the most indecent grin he'd made yet. A smile so ugly, even as a guy, I felt violated.

We had to kill him. I was convinced.

"All hands, attack Yokomichi! Class Rep, come on!"

"Ryouko! We mustn't resort to murder, you hear me!"

"We don't kill him right now, and he'll rape, kill and then eat you, all of you!!"

"Buhyahahaha! Chill Momokawa, I'm a nlce guy, so even if they're fiLthy sLuts, I'll eat them rEal tenDer! Here, Ice BrEath!!"

After making a quip at our idiotic discord, Yokomichi released a large volume of chalk white breath.

"—Kh!?"

Mei-chan reacted instantly. She dodged the Ice Breath that was both in name and appearance similar to the ice magic of Eis Blast, and barely avoided direct contact. But sadly, my butterflies weren't so lucky. Every one of them were instantly blown away.

Yokomichi just kept spewing out his Ice Breath and— What the, we're in a fog now!?

"Mei-chan, take some distance! Everyone else, keep close!"

The cold white mist thickened as it surrounded us. And in no time at all, Yokomichi's figure, as he was generating this blinding curtain, had disappeared on the other side.

Damn, we can't see shit in here.

He should be in the same condition. But, what if he has a skill to see past the

fog?

"L-listen girls, we have to fight now that it's come to this! Hold your weapons ready!"

"Ryouko, we can't!"

"This isn't about whether we kill him. Let's just focus on defending ourselves"

"... I guess it can't be helped then"

"I, I got it, Ryouko-chan!"

"No problem"

"Fueeehh, scaared, Kotori's scaaared..."

Thanks to Class Rep's convincing, the rest of them were finally getting prepped for battle.

"Class Rep, we're changing formation. He could attack from anywhere, so let's circle out"

"Eh, ah, got it... Kotori, you go in the middle. Me, Sakura and Momokawa-kun are surrounding her. Minami, stay in front of me, Asuna to Sakura, and Futaba-san please go over to Momokawa-kun. We don't know where the next attack will come from, so stay alert everyone"

Our formation was more a triangle than circle. With Takanashi-san at the center, we had the 3 rear liners, including me, with our backs to her. And in front of us we stationed the vanguard team members. Considering our numbers and everyone's powers, this was the best defensive position we could manage.

But still, Yokomichi never attacked us while we were practically dragging our legs to make this sudden formation change. Is he underestimating us?

"Momokawa-kun, what are our chances of escaping?"

"The entrance wasn't too far off... But trying to find it in this fog will be too dangerous. Plus, he could've already blocked it off with those webs"

That's probably why Yokomichi didn't attack us right away. When I said it, it suddenly felt very possible.

"More importantly, Takanashi-san!"

"Hiiik!?"

"Anything else you know about Yokomichi's powers?"

I really can't see a thing, but I kept my gaze fixed to the front, with me and Rem holding our spears ready. From behind me, I could hear Takanashi-san's 'uhhs' and 'umms' of deliberation on my question. Seriously, just tell me already.

"W-well you see, Kotori can't see it if she doesn't look at it so... there was a whole lot and, Kotori doesn't remember"

So she means like, if she doesn't directly look at the guy, she can't see his Status stuff like Job name or skills.

"Anything you can remember?"

"Uhh, that icy magic was... it was from Nagae-san, if Kotori recalls"

"— CorRRrect! Damn, Kotori-cHan, she can totAlly see my Status"

We could hear Yokomichi from beyond the mist. The direction of his voice was unclear, but it was apparent that he was at a distance close enough to hear us talk.

"So yeah, Yukiko was a CryomaNcer you know. Always sCared and faint-heArted and totally Yukiko-like. Not like she Didn't have aTTack magic like Eis SagiTta, cause she ToTally did, but then, she was alWays too scared to fight mOnsters. So gueSs what sHe did. She used This very same Eiz Mist and hId away inslde, letting everything Hostile pass by uNaware. So girly-like isn't she? She was adorable—"

"Got you!!"

With a heated yell, Kenzaki-san took a large stride forward, and swung at him.

It looked as if something shaped like Yokomichi was split in two... wait no, a mirage? The figure instantly lost its color and blended into the fog.

"Bufufu, that one's Eis Mirage. ThoughT it was Me, didn'chA?"

Tch, clicked Kenzaki-san in annoyance, as she stepped back into position.

"Looks like he can make illusions in the fog"

“Unff, every tiMe I use this Skill, I feel One with YukikO prEcious”

Hearing a phrasing that feels somehow familiar, I started to see one, two, many Yokomichi-like chubby shadows. They all looked blurred under the cover of mist and... Shit, I can't tell which one's real at all.

“Hey, heey guys, where's the real one, guyyys”

“Don't panic Minami. He'll have to move to attack us, so it's that one”

“— You reAlly sure aBout thAt”

I felt a whistle of wind in my ear. The sound somehow seemed familiar.

“Ouch!?”

Yelped Natsukawa-san. I looked back in a panic, and saw her holding her cheek while still grasping her knife.

“Minami, what happened!?”

“I'm a-alright, no biggie, it's just a scrat—!?”

A beam of blood trailed along her cheek. It was most definitely just a scratch. It was at the level where Souma Sakura's healing magic could take care of it in a jiffy. But just as she spoke, Natsukawa-san went ghastly pale in the face.

“Eww, what is this... it's slimy and, and, stinks...”

On closer inspection, I could see a clear mucous-y substance mixed with the blood along her cheek.

“Oooff, so goOod, you're so taSty Minami-cHan! It's A whLe diffErent Flavor from YuKiko-chan... no Wonder you're our trAck and fiElD super ace. It's full of Your livelinEss and Energy, wild yet feMinine, your bloOd's got this dEliCiously miLD flavoR.”

“... It's, his tongue”

I witnessed Yokomichi licking his lips, on the other side of the fog.

Chapter 63: The Cannibal Hungers (2)

It really was his tongue. A long, slimy tongue. Like the one that great frog boss of the lake had. He had one as well.

In other words, the additional substance smeared on Natsukawa-san's cheek would be: his saliva. He had soggily licked her on the face.

"E-eww! Ew, it's dirty, yuck— AH, uhh, kuu..."

"Minami, what happened!?"

"Oh, noice, working Wonders ain't iT? Like, poTent as fuck? That's goOod. I'd be aNNoyed if she had a rEsistance skill or sOmething"

"Watch out! He's got paralysis poison on his tongue!"

"Well techNically, I'm growWing poison tHorns on it. Got it frOm eatinG this weiRd yellow froG, and hoNestly, thought It was preTTy shit... YeaaAh, this is That 'useless juNk suddEnly becOmes relevant' troPe huH!"

'Legit MC 101 right here!', he howled in distinct joy, while I was hastily rummaging through my bag.

I had nothing for paralysis. But thinking on it, he called it 'poison', so if I use the antidote that I previously only used for making poison butterflies, it just might work.

"Please let this heal her— Healing Light!"

"BUHAHA, Sakura-chAn, aRe you being leGit here? That's Just healing Magic you knOw! That shit just heaLs HP, not Status eFFects, DUH!"

Can't be too sure about that. Souma Sakura had this cheat-like Job called Saintess. She might as well have the specs to heal stat effects along with HP, no problem.

"Sorry Sakura-chan... it isn't, working"

"N-No way, why!?"

"BUHAHAHAHAHA!! My sides are in OrBiT!!"

Tch, this bitch is useless even at her specialty. If I had to, right here, right now, elect one of us as the biggest dead weight, I'd choose her instantly.

"Class Rep, my antidote could do something about this. Try it on her"

"Alright"

"Wow, what's up with that, MomOkawa? You can make drugs and shit? Let me guess, the job is... Pharmacy!"

WRONG, dumbass. Also, I had no obligation to correct him either.

"Your silence only means I'm right, aren't I? Bufufuh"

This guy had to be missing a decent amount of brain cells. Did he think he'd become the intellectual type now?

Well, thanks to Yokomichi having a blast all by himself, Natsukawa-san managed to apply my antidote.

"Minami, how do you feel?"

"I can move now... But not much, my strength is a bit, gone"

Natsukawa-san informed Class Rep of her condition in a weak, almost silent voice. She wasn't completely recovered via the antidote, though I can't say I was expecting it to be that easy.

"Look out, Minami— Ugh!?"

"Ah! Asuna-chan!"

Kenzaki-san was trying to cover for Natsukawa-san as she couldn't move under paralysis, but she wasn't up to the task, and as a result, she too became a victim of the vile tongue. A slight cut, like she had been touched with a knife, appeared along her exposed thigh.

"Oho! What's this... This taste is even more feisty than Minami-chan! The power, I feel da PAWAH!!"

"Asuna, take th—"

"How about NOPE. C'mon, let me have some too"

Kenzaki-san's surroundings became home to sharp whips of wind. Try handing

over the antidote and the tongue would latch onto the hand, try throwing it and the tongue would grasp it mid-air.

"It's fine... I just feel a little, numb, is all. I can fight, fine"

"Heh, so Asuna's the High Res type? But look at That, those movements aren't so Pin-Point anymore, aRe theY?"

It's not like Natsukawa-san fainted from it, and from my perspective, Kenzaki-san looked fine, holding her sword with the same strength as usual. But if it's against a swordsman or warrior, in other words, close combat types, they should be able to tell the difference from a slight paralysis. Though there's always the possibility that Yokomichi's trying to be cool by saying lines from martial-arts manga.

"Shit..."

Barely no time had passed, and he already got two of our fighters. This is bad, he's just playing games with us with zero effort, and he wasn't even a boss monster.

Still, from staying hidden in the mist, to confusing us with illusions, Yokomichi's defenses were practically flawless. Class Rep and Souma Sakura did try firing their magic a couple times, but to no effect. These two had already acquired their respective long range area of effect spells, Eis Blast and Lux Blast, and they'd tried using those to get him from across the fog. But yet again, no luck.

Other than hiding in his fog, Yokomichi likely had defensive measures against incoming spells. It could be some ice attribute defensive spell plundered from Nagae-san, or something else entirely.

Whatever he had, fact is that we lacked a means to attack him. And obviously, we couldn't do an all or nothing charge. We'd be finished if he had webs set up all around us. There's also the chance that he'll avoid the vanguard and go directly for us support roles.

In the end, we couldn't budge from our current formation.

Yet, on the flipside, Yokomichi had that convenient tongue of his that was gradually, but devastatingly, breaking down our forces.

"Khh, ouch!?"

"Class Rep!"

"MWahh! And This one, this Flavor here's reEal subtle! It feels aLL Cool and Intellectual rolling on my tOngue—"

And now, his vile tongue had reached us mages in the back. I'm a guy, and he probably didn't want to cross 'that' line, so the next one to get tasted would be Mei-chan, Souma Sakura, or Takanashi-san huh... So one in three. If we could predict who he'll target, we could try and intercept—

"Leet's see noww, who shaAall I Partake in neXt... Will it be miss Top Hottie of 2-7, Souma Sakura? Or how about the DElectable candy that is Kotori-chan, the Busty loli? MiGht it perHaps be the mouth-watering Piece of eXtra Large Steak, the Mystery Super Titties-chan!"

Yokomichi should be well aware of his superiority in this situation. He was acting all casual, but he still had his tongue poised for the next assault. Talking boisterously like this should be for getting himself revved up, but it also served as a psychological attack towards the enemy, causing unease and panic.

"HyahhAA!! I'm fucking Ready! We're saVing the Best for RIGHT NOW, Souma SakuRAA—!"

"—!?"

The paralyzing tongue zipped in irregular zigzags in the air, slipping past Kenzaki-san, whose senses had been numbed, and aimed straight for Souma Sakura, whom she was guarding behind her. By the time I saw it, it was already there. In this thick fog, I had no way of observing anything unless it was near point blank range. And Souma Sakura, she had no way of blocking such an assault— or so I thought.

"AGYAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!?"

The vehement scream did not come from the girl who was supposedly defiled by the filthy tongue. It actually came from the other side of the fog. In other words, it was Yokomichi, not Souma Sakura, who'd taken damage.

"Wuh, what the Fuck is that... you got a fRiggin barrieR!?"

Souma Sakura was crouching down, frozen in fear, and looked extremely ripe for the picking. However, what I saw enveloping her body was a faint sphere of light. Looking at her figure surrounded by the elegant ball of light, I could only see it as some kind of omni-directional barrier or shield.

"... That, is one of the Saintess' inherent skills, Oracle Field. It's a powerful barrier of light that could even divert the Cerberus' fire blast."

Expositioned Class Rep in a somewhat dispirited tone.

Tch, damn you, Souma Sakura, no actually, these girls were still hiding something like this, like why.

"Arh, dat stinGs dAmmid! Fuck, ya Burned my tongue bitCh! What's uP with thaT OP barrier asspull, fuckKing hEll!"

Hate to say this, but I agree with Yokomichi here. Now that I knew that Souma Sakura had this great self-defense barrier, I could also see the utter bullshit of her cowering in the back-lines.

Fuck me, if I knew she had an ability that guaranteed her own safety, I'd have made a plan to use her as bait to draw Yokomichi out of this fog. But because she'd revealed it just now, only using it to protect her precious self, I can't use this for shit.

"Tchh, guess I gotta Leave Souma Sakura for Last after all... Ehe~, no worries, she'll make for great Desert"

Since Oracle Field was revealed, it became merely a self-defense option for her own use. If I had to make a plan involving it at this point... There's always the option of having her do a full frontal charge at him. It could be just the thing to reverse this situation where we were being more cornered by the second. But now that I think about it, there's no way Souma Sakura would consent to doing any dirty work like that.

Screw that, this bitch is more trouble than she's worth.

"Mei-chan, the next one should come for you or Takanashi-san. Can you catch it?"

"If it's one in two, maybe"

After asking in a low voice, I got a response in the affirmative. If Yokomichi's planning to follow the same pattern, Mei-chan should be able to counter him, to an extent. If we can cut off his paralytic tongue, I'm guessing Yokomichi's method of ranged attack will be eliminated, and he'll have to either run away, or switch to close quarters combat.

We took a few hits already, but it's fine. We still had a chance at victory.

"... but who?"

I poise my Blackhair Bind to shoot at a moment's notice. If I can slow down the tongue even a little, I'm sure Mei-chan will take full advantage of that delay.

My chances are 50-50. Yokomichi will be gunning for either Mei-chan or Takanashi-san.

"Eeny meeny miNy mo, taste a Girly by the— Nope, it's a Trap!"

And that's why I was helpless. His tongue was actually aimed at me.

"UAAAHH!!"

"Kotarou-kun!?"

A sharp pain surged through my neck. Crap, I'm done for— At Mei-chan's yell, I was ready for some profuse bleeding, but in reality, felt only a drop of blood sliding down.

My wound was, shallow.

He'd said they were poison thorns, so it shouldn't have that much slicing ability.

"Huff, huff, haaa..."

My pulse suddenly shot through the roof. The moment I thought I was in danger of dying, I ended up starting to panic. Calm down me, I'm still fine. This is nothing, a mere flesh wound.

As I got a grip on myself, I told Mei-chan, who looked like she was itching to run to my aid, to stand her ground.

That aside, fucking Yokomichi, despite everything he said, he literally did aim for a guy. Guess that means he was actually fighting seriously too, in his own

way. I could've sworn he was only drunk on the notion of dominating the top-class beauties gathered here...

“...-ous”

Right then, an almost inaudible mutter came from beyond the mist. Here I thought he'd be laughing his ass off as usual, boasting how he went and paralyzed me, but he only muttered, quietly.

“... -elicios”

Delicious. I'm certain that's what he said.

“DeLiCiouSss!! THISH iSH DE-FUCKING-LICIOUUUUUSSS!!!”

It sounded like he'd reached the height of lunacy.

“Wuh, wh-what the fuck was THAT! So good, holY Fuck it's goOOD, so Dayum GOODD! MomoKaWaaa, yer BloOOod, how come ish sho GOoooOOOooOOD!?”

Fuck if I know.

“UuoOOoOoOo!! Traps Aren't so Gay after aLI! This is IT, I'm Joining the baNdwagon and LoooVInG liillitt!!”

Shit the bed. This cannibalistic blood sommelier just told me my blood is leagues more delicious than all the hot girls here. What do I even do with this information?

No seriously, this reaction was too strange. The reason why my blood would be especially delicious, or rather, different, was... Ah, could it be an effect of Black Bloodline?

“C-can't, I can't handle it AnYmoRe... that Divine taste... I's gotta have moOAar, MomokAWAaAAAa!”

Yokomichi roared like he'd just snorted a palmful of goma drug.

“Yerrr, milIIIIIIIIIlnnNNeeee!!”

He was coming for me.

Even without the senses of a warrior, I could just tell.

“Won't let you. Kotarou-kun has—”

And as for the Berserker, she was way ahead of me.

The tongue was coming straight at me. This fleshy whip that had its tip riddled in paralytic pins like a cactus was shooting towards me and, Mei-chan grabbed it.

“IGH!? I-AaaAA!!?”

Using strength on a level that could punch a hole through an Armor Bear, she pulled. And along with an ugly scream, Yokomichi was instantly yanked in from beyond the mist.

It seemed as if he'd stretched his tongue to the limit. Desperately struggling with his mouth wide open, Yokomichi was being pulled in by Mei-chan—By the Berserker, who had her halberd readied high with the other hand, ready to end things.

“— Me! Protecting him!”

She swung down without the slightest hint of mercy.

“GYiyaAAAAAAaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!”

Those would be his death throes— No, not quite. It was a scream of pain from paying the price for avoiding a certain fatality.

Yokomichi understood that he had no way of slipping away, so in that instant, he bit his tongue off.

“AArrrghh, id hrrrdddss!!”

He was yelling in agony as if he'd lost something important, while Mei-chan, who had missed her mark due to an unforeseen form of evasion, took to making a swift follow-up.

However, I guess it should be expected that Yokomichi too had ample experience in battling monsters. Even as he recoiled from his amputated tongue, he was able to defend himself from Mei-chan.

“FuGh, this bitch, DIE damnit! UGAAA—!!”

Right before Mei-chan could close the distance, Yokomichi widened his bloodied mouth and spat out, not spider webs, not icy breath, but intense

crimson flames. This bastard, don't tell me he ate a Red Dog boss and can blast fire too!

"Ng, Khh!?"

Not even Mei-chan could withstand a face full of fire. Her body sizzled in the heat, as she made a quick retreat.

This is bad, he's getting too far. Yokomichi used his fire to chase Mei-chan away from him.

His tongue was cut off from the base so there was no more risk of him using that, but there really was no telling what other long range attacks he had in there. We had to finish this before he ran back into his Eis Mist. It's time we fought back.

"All hands, attack! Rem, you're up!!"

As if tapping in for Mei-chan, Rem charged in with her spear. And one step behind her, I followed.

"Blackhair Bind!!"

"NUuaAA! Oiii, not this shit againn!?"

The moment his flames paused, I tied him up with Blackhair Bind. The braided tentacles latched onto his wrists, ankles and waist.

This was of course, something he had already escape from once. And as expected, Yokomichi grew out mantis blades from his elbows, whereupon he would release himself— but this time, he didn't quite make it.

"TCHH, fuck DAmmit!"

Rem had gotten dangerously close, and he couldn't cut away all the binds. Forgoing the blackhairs on his ankles, Yokomichi used his now unbound arms to block Rem. Wait a sec, I can't see his greatsword on him. Maybe he dropped it when Mei-chan yanked him in. What a fool, but this is exactly how I like it.

"I'll destroy yoOOUUuu!?"

With no sword, Yokomichi could only use his fists. The mantis blades had now vanished and replaced by a pair of spiky white bone-like gauntlets. Perhaps he

got these from preying on Skeletons or some derivative monster of that family.

With those fists-cum-spiked clubs, Yokomichi countered Rem's spear.

He first shoved away the spear blade. Hard enough to break apart the wooden spear. But, Rem knew not fear. Unfaltering at the loss of her weapon, Rem charged in with a body slam. Her's was a small skeletal body, such an attack would be practically powerless, but Rem actually managed to make it work.

"Oi! This little shiT, Die!"

His fists of bone came down on Rem like a hammer, and she ended in swift destruction. But because of that, in that single moment, Yokomichi's focus was concentrated entirely on Rem. Pain from his missing tongue. Panic from being suddenly pulled into close combat. Yokomichi was, in that situation, not in his best condition to react.

"YaAAAAAAAAAA!!"

So now, it was my turn to strike.

Not unlike Rem had just before, I positioned my spear and charged. I can't expect any real fire power from my curses. But I had this, this fine steel spear. It'd be a waste not to put it to use.

I might be a Shaman, I might have no real skills or status corrections, but what I did have was this spear. Solid steel and with a long reach. And with Yokomichi practically handing me his unwariness, I couldn't afford to miss.

So I cast far away any semblance of fear or guilt towards the concept of murder. Without the slightest hesitation, I mustered every ounce of my strength to kill my classmate, this unbearably ugly, repulsive and vile, cannibalizer.

"Ugha!?"

My speartip stabbed into Yokomichi's side. But, it's, tough. The sheer level of resistance I was feeling completely overshadowed the time I stabbed the Red Dog. It was as if, the thing I was trying to penetrate was a thick, rubber tire.

I hadn't missed but, it was nowhere close to enough.

“Gha, Aaa... Thaaat huuurt, MoMOKaWaaAaAA!”

“Woaah!?”

One swing from Yokomichi’s arm. With that, my spear met the same end as Rem. Irrecoverably smashed, the tip that had inched into his stomach feebly clattered as it dropped to the ground. As for myself, the wielder of the broken weapon, though not as hard as Rem, I had also crashed pathetically into the floor.

“Haah, Haa... fuh...Fukhh... I need moRe BloOd...”

With blood flowing out from his side, Yokomichi glared at me in bated breath. Those bloodshot eyes, yup, this guy’s got ‘em, the murder eyes.

“Buh, bluhd, BLOOOOD!! YOu, MomokaWA, I’mmaa, dEVOur, YOUUUUUUUHH!!”

“Kotarou-kun!”

Yokomichi jumped me. Right then, Mei-chan, who knows when she got there, grab my collar from the back and pulled.

She prioritized rescue over offense, and for that, I’m in her debt.

“Spread all Anguish— Contra-beat Butterfly”

After that successful dodge, I unleashed my curse. The material for the Contra-beat Butterflies this time was something I’d been using pretty much constantly, Ointment A.

This thing could quickly heal up cuts caused by monster bites or scratches. Now reversed, this awesome healing effect was launching the offensive on Yokomichi. This ointment that could close up any wound that wasn’t fatal was now, yup—

“IEYAAAAAAaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHH!?”

It opened them right up. It strengthened blood flow. And maybe, it even made the recipient more sensitive to pain.

Yokomichi, who had been coming at me without a care to the tiny stab wound I gave him, was now being gouged into by the Contra-beat Butterflies, howling

in pain.

“AAAHHHH!! SHIHTT! FUCKINGG SHIIAAA—”

Even while writhing in pain, Yokomichi began breathing fire. Mei-chan held onto me, and nimbly withdrew.

“Let go, I’m fine already! It’s now or never, we can kill—”

“...Sorry Kotarou-kun. That might, not be a good idea”

Spewing crazy amounts of fire, Yokomichi had essentially built a wall round himself, making it a situation where we couldn’t close in at all. After that, all I saw beyond the blaze was him turning around, and running off.

“UaaAAAAaaAAA!! Momokawa!! MOMOKAWAAAAAAaaaAAAaaAAA!!”

Yokomichi fled, while yelling out my name, for some reason.

“So he ran... Haah”

I let out a sigh in relief. Whether it came from surviving this ordeal, or from ending up not having to kill a person,

I didn’t know, not really.

Chapter 64: The Resolve To Murder Is

We had repelled the calamity that was Yokomichi Hajime, and left the Rook Spider's pit. Too bad there wasn't a transfer circle there. But even if there was, we couldn't activate it since we didn't have the Rook spider's core.

We continued our journey through the caves, in silence. Everyone, was silent.

"..."

I wanted to give them a piece of my mind, a big one. We couldn't kill that piece of shit Yokomichi. No one even fucking helped. Only me and Mei-chan were fighting that psycho.

Like fuck, were these girls actually delusional? Especially that bitch Souma Sakura, doing unnecessary shit as always. If you got a problem, you can just go stick it up your..... But of course, I wasn't so stupid as to blow my top over something like this right now.

Talking about how shit they are would come later. At least, not here. Better if it's at a Fairy Square.

"Ah, th, that..."

While our journey continued in this gloomy vibe, Natsukawa-san, who'd taken point, spoke up with a nuance of despair. Shit, looks like we ain't outta the woods yet.

"What, the hell? ... Another spider nest!"

At the end of the cave, there was a hole that seemed to be the entrance to another Rook Spider habitation. This one looked larger than the one earlier.

"Momokawa-kun, are you sure we should head in like this?"

"We have to pass through eventually, don't we?"

"Well... It does seem unrealistic to go back to the previous fairy square at this point"

Right now, we seriously needed a fairy square to recuperate.

Our combat potential had been slashed in half. Although not entirely paralyzed, Natsukawa-san, Kenzaki-san, and Mei-chan, our vanguard team, were still afflicted with paralysis poison from that sleazebag, Yokomichi. My meds seemed to have alleviated most of the effect, but it'd be better if they recovered fully, and that took time.

Class rep was also afflicted, but the effect was light, probably because she had a mage class. I also got hit but... I still didn't feel anything. Maybe because I'm a Shaman? Maybe there's a hidden correction that grants me poison immunity?

Well, even so, I was sure as hell not gonna use poisons on myself to find out.

Rem was also gone. Which meant that I'd also lost a valuable asset. As soon as we arrive at the next fairy square, I gotta gather materials to resummon her.

"Alright, let's stop here and get ready before we head in there"

"Yes, let's do that"

No one was opposed. Well, not like they were enthralled by the idea either.

I mean, we were in a cave, with a fucking spider hole, and we were about to camp right in front of it. Ants or mantises could ambush us from the hole or from behind. We had no choice but to alternate between resting and keeping watch of both the front and back of the cave.

But honestly, I couldn't rest. I couldn't believe I was having such a hard time calming down.

"... Kotarou-kun, I'm sorry."

After finishing her shift as the first on watch duty, Mei-chan said that as she sat down next to my lonesome self.

"Why, are you apologizing?"

"I, let Yokomichi-kun escape. I was, so close to killing him too"

Man, our morals sure are turning to shit. She was calling him with a '-kun' like normal, but apologizing for not being able to kill him?

Mei-chan seemed to be regretting it, but during that opportune moment, her arm was numbed from grabbing onto that tongue, so she couldn't possibly

follow up with any fierce attack. If she still had power in her arm, she could have pulled Yokomichi over to me, I'd bind him, and then she'd crush him with her halberd.

"It might've been for the best, since we didn't become murderers"

"No, Yokomichi-kun will surely come back and attack Kotarou-kun"

I wanted to deny it, but when Mei-chan said it with that much confidence, even I started to feel the same way.

"It would've been for the best, to finish him then and there"

That's right, since, this Skill Eater would get stronger the more he ate. When we meet him next time, he'll definitely have newly plundered skills.

The first time was bad enough. If he got more nasty abilities... Shit, I don't want to imagine how fucked we'll be then.

"... Mei-chan, you deliberated on it too, right?"

"On what?"

She had questioned back in an expression that made me highly doubt her moral compass, but I'm gonna pretend I didn't notice that, and elaborate.

"Killing someone I mean"

"I didn't. If it's to protect Kotarou-kun, I won't hesitate to kill, even if it's a fellow classmate"

Man, I'm pretty sure I'm an asshole for feeling relieved from her bold answer.

When Mei-chan went berserk, she seemed to lose any ability to settle things humanely. When she fought Yokomichi, she was surely attacking him with the intent to kill.

But, if she told me that it was in order to protect me, that she'd even be willing to kill others... As a human being, and as a man, It didn't sit right with me to hear her say that. She could have just sugar-coated it like Souma Sakura.

Still, I was glad. Glad that I had someone like her to watch my back. After all, the only one I could depend on in this sorry excuse of a party was Mei-chan. In a way, I was actually really happy to have her protect me.

“I see. Thank you”

“Yeah, so, don’t worry so much, Kotarou-kun.”

Ah, She saw through me huh. Now I feel stupid for worrying.

“Sorry”

“It’s okay. Yokomichi-kun has already killed Nagae-san. Murderer? No, he’s a cannibal, right? He’s pretty much no longer a human being. He’s like a Goma, an enemy that we have to defeat”

“You’re, right”

She was right. Yokomichi was a monster. A man-eating, blood-chugging monster. I don’t know which mad god changed his Job to ‘Cannibalizer’, but it was obvious that Yokomichi was no longer a human.

If you hesitate to kill a monster because of morals and ethics, then you’re the one whose gonna kick the bucket.

Even if I say that, will I be able to convince myself to carry out the deed?

“Don’t worry.... I won’t hesitate either. So next time, let’s kill that son of a bitch together.”

“Mm, thanks, Kotarou-kun.”

Once I did it, I’d probably still be conflicted. What if the things Souma Sakura said were right after all? Did I really have the resolve to kill others? Could I carry that weight? I didn’t know.

But, if someone had to bear the brand of murderer, it shouldn’t be only Meichan. I would bear it with her.

That, I was sure even I could do.

Chapter 65: Rush

“— Now then, guess it’s about time”

We were, fortunately, not attacked by any monsters during the break, so we were able to at least get some rest. The color of fatigue hadn’t quite left our faces, and the girls with paralysis weren’t fully recovered either.

“Listen, everyone. Inside there might be a Rook spider. But, just like with the previous pit, we don’t know if we can transfer out from there. If it’s not a boss monster, we should avoid fighting”

“So then, we should first figure out if there’s a transfer circle and kill the spider if there is. If not, then just pass through, do I have that right?”

Towards Souma Sakura’s inquiry, class rep agreed with a nod.

Although I wanted some monster cores, now was not the time. It’d be better to avoid a fight if we can. We aren’t in some RPG where the only way forward is to hack’n’slash every single monsters like an idiot.

“Well, guess I’ll take point”

“Yes, we leave it to you, Minami”

We’d have the thief go ahead and scour for the possible transfer point. Meanwhile, the rest of us will prioritize looking for the exit.

After confirming our strategy one last time, we descended into the spider pit.

The light elemental flying around Natsukawa-san lit up the path inside the dark hole. It didn’t look much different from the earlier nest. Other than expecting that Yokomichi might be laying in wait here too, nothing much had changed.

“It’s quite spacious here”

“Yeah, might just be the size of a forest dome”

It really was around the size of a domed baseball stadium. Souma Sakura’s elemental couldn’t illuminate the entire area.

Anyway, I couldn't see the spider or any other insect monsters here....

"Ryouko-chan! I don't see it here"

After searching for about 5 minutes, along with Natsukawa-san's pleasant voice came disappointing news.

"I understand, come back now, Minami"

"But Ryouko, We don't see the exit either"

As Kenzaki-san said, the only problem we had now was that we couldn't find the exit. We've circled around the whole dome only to realize that the only connection to the outside was the one we used to enter.

"... What do you think, dead end?"

"Might be above us"

This was a nest created by insects. That being the case, they would have no reason to create an exit near the ground. Whether it's wall or ceiling, many insects can walk just about anywhere, ergo, they can make the exit anywhere as well.

"But then, we might not be able to get to it"

"Hmm, I think I can create a makeshift rope with my black hair binds"

And, just as I looked up to the dark ceiling in consideration — our eyes met.

Eight crimson eyes glowing in the dark.

"It's the Rook Spider, no..."

Eight more eyes pop in, then 18 more, then more. When I'd counted those, there were already more, 30, 40, 50, what the fuck.

Gleaming red eyes, countless as stars in the sky, blanketed the ceiling.

"Retreat! There's too many!"

Takanashi-san's scream reverberated throughout the whole pit, and at the time, every goddamned monster dropped down to attack.

The first one to land was, covered in a gray shell with 8 huge legs, it was the Rook Spiders.

“Damn, over there is!?”

We were blocked from our only way out by 2 Rook Spiders that landed in front of the exit, like intimidating castles, just as their names implied.

Not only that. They spewed copious amounts of webbing from their bulging abdomens, so much that it'd put Yokomichi's display to shame, and that blocked the exit. The sticky, white, voluminous thread quickly closed off the exit, completely isolating us.

“They, actually set a trap...”

We'd already fucked up from the start. We'd somehow or other made it all the way here. Since we were weakened, we wanted to quickly reach safety and so, rushed. We all probably thought that we could push through in the end.

Shit shit, it was me who'd actually ended up thinking of it like a game.

Just look at those numbers. There was no rule that said we'd only face a convenient amount of monsters that we could safely push through. Not anymore though. Dungeon just went, ‘fuck you guys, enjoy my special monster house bitches!’

All those other times, we'd been merely been lucky.

“Wh, what do we do? At this rate...”

“We break through, no other choice! Mei-chan, get those spiders!”

I didn't have time to lament on the stupidity that walked us into this monster house trap. It's better to actually deal with the situation before we fucking die.

Even if it was already too late, I won't just sit around waiting for my death.

“Mei-chan, Kenzaki-san! Stop the spiders! Souma, Class rep, spell walls, stop the swarm of ants. Natsukawa-san, you deal with the stray ants! Also, lend me your Red Knife! Takanashi-san follow me, we'll clear up the exit — spread out Rotten Bog!”

Don't know how much of that they'll follow, but I rapid-fired orders anyway, while employing my own obstruction type curse magic.

Mei-chan had already rushed forward with a battle cry, fiercely swinging at

the Spiders. An army of ants had began crawling from the ceiling across the walls to the floor right after the Spiders had landed. We had no luxury to strategize.

“Everyone, we need to escape from here, now! Do what you have to until Momokawa-kun clears the exit!”

“Alright, good luck, Momokawa-kun!”

After Class Rep voiced agreement, starting with Souma Sakura, the other girls finally started moving. Natsukawa-san was even nice enough to dash up to me with her ace-tier speed, hand over her knife, and dash back instantly.

“Kotarou-kun, go!”

Mei-chan slashed away like a veritable storm, and pushed the Rook Spiders away from the exit. Kenzaki-san also brandished her twin blades, one, a long sword, and the other, a flaming saber, and helped clear the way. Well, it’s now or never.

“Takanashi-san, after me!”

“B-but I...”

“It isn’t safe here, it isn’t safe anywhere, just run girl!”

I grabbed onto the hesitant Takanashi-san’s arm, and made a break for the exit. The distance was no more than 30 meters, but honestly, it’s a shit ass crazy plan to run through the place where vanguard fighters and giant monsters were duking it out.

But still, I avoiding tripping over like an idiot, and somehow made it. Also, Takanashi-san, she managed to follow after me, half crying.

“Haaa.... Haaa.... Shit dammit, there’s way too much....”

When we’d finally arrived, what greeted us was absurd amount of webbing. If I were to charge in, I’d be a statue within thirty centimeters of penetration. Trying a knife on it would end up dulling said knife.

So to overcome this ordeal, we needed the Red Knife with its blade imbued with fire. Elemental weaponry FTW.

“With this — Uaah, hot! HOT!?”

As I imagined, the webbing burned away easily under the Red Knife’s flames. However, some of these threads, still on fire, were dropping all around me. Quite dangerous. If I’m not careful, I’ll be burned.

“Momokawa-kun! Not done yet!? We’re can’t hold on much longer — Eis Blast!”

Damnit, I know! With a quick look back, I could see the fight on their end was pretty intense as well. Rapid shooting spells everywhere to prevent the ants from getting past the barriers of ice and light. Their output was outstanding.... But the ants didn't know fear, they were like death soldiers, madly rushing forward to fulfill their duty. Our mages were already on the brink, even with Natsukawa-san's help.

Mei-chan and Kenzaki-san were also fighting the good fight. Of course, it wasn't like there was a rule that they would fight one Rook Spider each. There wasn't anything stopping the ants from butting in. Although they seem to be managing for now.

Naturally, those two wouldn't be able to aggro all the ants, so it was inevitable that some made their way towards me and Takanashi-sa—

“No, NOOOOOOO!? DON'TCOMEANYCLOSER!!”

The ants coming straight towards us caused Takanashi-san to scream. Though, it wasn't your ordinary scream. The sage's very words contained power.

Sacred Tongue • Words of Rejection. With the Sage's skill activating, the monsters stopped moving just as Takanashi-san decreed.

The ants that were about to jump us suddenly froze in their tracks, their sharp fore-limbs still in the air, poised to attack. Since I could see a bit of twitching from the tips, perhaps they were resisting the words of power.

“Alright, Takanashi-san, keep it up!”

“Aieeee! Kotori caann’t!”

Despite her denying it, the ants were still stationary.

It was totally worth it bringing Takanashi-san with me. It's such an awesome

power. Using it like Souma Sakura does, as in, only for self-protection, was such a waste. In these situations, the least they could do is become human shields.

“Okay, half way there...”

While everyone kept giving their all in battle, I continued burning away the spider thread seal. At this rate, we should manage to escape.

But, the dungeon just had to bitchslap us at the last moment.

— VMMMMMM

It was a familiar sound of buzzing insects. An annoying noise they'd make as they rapidly flapped their wings. There was only one kind of insect that would make this despair inducing noise.

And we knew it all too well.

“Well fuck... Now the mantises show up ...”

Up above from the ceiling of the pit, came down the green knights with dual sickles. The Knight Mantises.

“Kuh...”

“Damn, reinforcements”

“UAAAAA, h-how, are we, supposed to even!?”

There were 4 Knight Mantises in all. They went to each of the vanguards. Meichan and Kenzaki-san who were in their respective death matches with the Rook Spiders, and Natsukawa-san who was holding off the ants.

We had 3 vanguards. Since each of them picked 1, that last one—

“A, ah, Aa...”

Rushed over to me and Takanashi-san, the weakest members of the party.

“NOOO!? Get away, getawaygetawaygetaway!!”

Words of Rejection activated. The mantis froze just like the Ants..... W-wait, it wasn't working. It's sickles still moved, slowly, but still moved.

“No, NOO, No, please no... ”

Takanashi-san was actually whining while she squeezed her hands together as

if praying. Maybe this helped her activate her Words of Rejection to the limit?

Still, the mantis moved, even if slightly. Maybe, if it took just one more step, if it stepped within Takanashi-san's barrier of rejection... Its effects would crumble.

"Shit, shitshit... Here of, all places..."

Like hell I'll die.

"Like hell I'll die!"

I swung the red knife in a frenzy, I didn't give a damn about the burns. But the webbing wouldn't burn along with the speed of my swings. It's slow. No, it did get a bit faster, but it'd be too late before I finished.

Fuck, it was all for nothing, too many monsters for us to handle. Any moment now, the sheer amount of ants may as well us.

Maybe, someone's already died?

"Damn, damn it all..."

This sucks. I'm so scared. So scared that I can't even look behind.

"Can't die here... Can't die here..."

I'm worried about them. Especially Mei-chan. But my head was filled to the brim with fear of my own death, and I kept slashing away in awkward movements.

The fear and pressure was driving me insane. My vision had gone white, I could pass out any moment. Even though I should be hearing the desperate cries of Takanashi-san using her Words of Rejection right behind me, I wasn't. I couldn't see anything. I couldn't, hear, anything.

But, for some reason, I did hear this:

"Save me, nii-san"

Souma Sakura. That bitch. Even until the last moment, she still kept being stupid.

I felt a deep resentment towards her, but right then,

"CROSS CALIBAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!"

Chapter 66: Enter the Hero

White. The light was a blinding white.

That intense white light blew away all the insects around me like a storm. Pawn Ants, despite being human-sized, were blasted off, swarm and all. Burned by the light, chopped up, their legs and body sections became individual pieces. The horde of insects literally disintegrated into ash from the white light.

The torrent of light further raged forwards as a gigantic shining sword and gouged into the ground. It split the ant horde and even slashed through the castles of gray, the Rook Spiders, like tofu in a split second.

The two spiders fell and the mantises and ants were reduced to half their numbers. Overpowered. Now this, this felt like real magic.

No, not quite — this was the power of the Hero.

“I’m here for you, Sakura”

Behind flowing locks of black hair, the light of determination could be seen from the eyes of the handsome and strong boy who stood there, his glimmering sword drawn.

It was the hero. It was, Souma Yuuto.

Shiramine Academy’s most perfect male student. The man most suitable for the title of Hero.

“Nii-san!”

“Thank God you’re safe, Sakura. Everyone too. But, it’s dangerous here, we have to get out quickly!”

As he shouted, he brandished his sword of light again. Then the white light, like a tornado, revolved around his blade, getting bigger and bigger.

There was no technique needed to accomplish his task. Before the destructive power of his light, the relentless ants, and even the mantis Natsukawa-san was dealing with, evaporated.

“Let’s move people! Yuuto-kun has cleared the way!”

Everyone's reaction was quick, they'd moved even before Class Rep had spoken. Except for me, I was still slightly dumbfounded.

I mean, hell! Souma-kun's power was way too overwhelming. It made our previous struggles look like child's play.

Haha, fucking idiot Yokomichi. This here's the real cheat!

"Let's go, Kotori!"

"Mm, Asuna-chan!"

Kenzaki-san came to pick up Takanashi-san, easily dealing with the mantis and ants still frozen due to words of rejection. I was completely ignored, She grabbed onto the small girl's hand and started running.

"Kotarou-kun!"

"I'm okay, handle those ants please"

The only one thinking of me, was of course, Mei-chan. I was so thankful for that, I could cry. But, I didn't need her to grab my hand like Takanashi-san. Since there were still so many ants, I had to work Mei-chan just a little longer so that the path Souma-kun had cleared out wouldn't be over run.

"Guys! Over here!"

Souma-kun, though not as intensely as the first time, was still waving around his sword, curb-stomping the horde of ants. Behind him, a huge hole had opened up, one we couldn't find in our initial search.

So, the passage was actually buried? I see. Souma-kun had come from the other side, he'd broken the wall and created this hole.

Finally finding the exit, I dashed to it with all the speed my legs could muster and somehow managed to slide through.

"I'm the last one! Close it now!"

"Got it, get back a little, Momokawa"

I tumbled to the side to avoid getting in the way of Souma-kun's attack. Turning around, I saw a scene of countless ants coming at us like a black tsunami.

“HAA!!”

With that shout, came another flash of light. Aiming at the entrance plus any ants there, the sword of light cut — causing the once open hole to be buried under a pile of earth and rubble.

“....Haaa”

That’s when I could finally sigh in relief.

“Ahh, nii-san, thank god, thank god...”

“I’m sorry Sakura, making you worried and all...”

“.....Haa”

Then I sighed in exasperation. Sure you could say it was a heartfelt reunion between siblings, but I couldn’t give one shit.

“Alright everyone, I know you’re tired, but we should get moving quickly. There’s a transfer circle not too far from here. We should use that to leave this insect cave ASAP”

Everyone raised a cheer. Of course, we all wanted to escape from this giant insect hell.

Even if we stayed, considering the ability of those ants, they could probably clear out the collapsed wall pretty quickly. You really can’t afford to relax anywhere in this place.

With dead tired bodies, we moved along the cave, Souma-kun leading.

“—Seriously, it’s great we could all reunite again”

“Even so, how did you know where we were?”

“It was a coincidence really. But when I got close enough to Sakura, the lux elemental showed me the way”

“Eh? Nii-san, you can also use Summon Lux Elemental?”

“Well, when I noticed, I’d learned it already. But unlike yours, it’s more blue-ish”

Like this, he said as he put out his finger, manifesting a light blue

phosphorescent light. It flew around like a firefly, then disappeared.

"I never thought, it could work for searching"

"You got it, maybe because you also use elementals? The others don't look like they understand"

And, after going over some details on how he happened to rushed over, Souma-kun turned towards me.

"By the way, that's Momokawa, and the person next to him..."

Before this, Souma-kun was already partied up with her sister, meeting the others along the way. Mei-chan and I were certainly the new faces here. Well I guess he needs a greeting?

"I'm a Shaman. And this is Futaba-san, she's a Berserker"

I told the truth. We couldn't exactly lie anymore since Takanashi-san possessed a skill to see others' Job and skills. So there was no longer a point in hiding Mei-chan's Job.

"Is it the Job's that made you so, slim"

"I, I guess... Uhm, hello"

Souma-kun looked a little, no, quite bewildered actually.

Well, it's no surprise, when any classmates saw the current Mei-chan, they had a similar reaction. Since it's a totally dramatic before and after effect, like the ones you see in those fishy dieting advertisements.

"You really saved us back there, Souma-kun. Thank you"

In front of the school's no.1 "Ikemen", Souma-kun, Mei-chan wasn't shy or nervous. She expressed thanks and showed a genuine smile. I wonder if it's because she's been accustomed to battle, that she could act so brazen?

Maybe she'd already fallen for Souma-kun who appeared super cool from the earlier rescue.

Women are said to be realistic creatures. It wouldn't be strange if she abandoned a weak shaman like me for a braver, more reliable and cool hero.

She might be interacting with me normally now, but soon enough, she'd start

to subtly take distance and.... Fuck, it's depressing just thinking about it.

"There's the room we want"

Apparently, we'd arrived at our destination. The place he pointed to was, I see, it was another one of those places where the cave bits end and stone dungeon starts.

As we entered, we were on a path leading straight to the boss room. Similar to the one in the Orthus' room, I could see a faintly glowing magic circle engraved on a platform.

"Ah, I just remembered, we didn't collect the cores from the Rook Spiders"

"Don't worry about it class rep. Since I already defeated the monster that was already in this room, we can use its core"

"I'm impressed, Yuuto-kun"

"It was weaker than the Cerberus, so maybe that's why I could solo it. Anyway, let's quickly get inside. If this works the same as the previous ones, then we should be able to teleport to a fairy square"

We were in dire need of some rest, so his suggestion was welcome. We'll be humbly making use of the core Souma-kun had.

Everyone entered the circle in practiced movements. Finally, Souma-kun, who held the soft ball sized red crystal, the core, spoke,

"Okay, I'll start it up"

The core reacted immediately, letting out an ample volume of light. As if melting into the light, the core began to slowly crumble. At the same time, the magic circle below began its own flickering. When that light got intense enough to blind us of our surroundings, that's when we'd get teleported.

So basically, we're out of here in less than 10 sec —

— Wah!"

Suddenly, I felt a force on my body. I was pushed. From the back, strongly.

I yelled like an idiot as the hard stone floor made its way to me, all I could manage to do was pull up my hands so that I wouldn't land face first.

“Ouch!?”

It was falling damage. I’d pitched forward and fallen to the floor. I was just standing normally, how come I suddenly fell?

The reason was obvious. I was pushed — but by who?

“Ke-Kenzaki-san...”

I turned around to find, Kenzaki Asuna, with both her hands stuck out, she’d stiffened up in that posture. Her expression could be described as stupefied, or perhaps blank, herself not understanding what she’d just done.

That, was the last I saw of them.

“Kotarou-kun!?”

“No, Futaba-san! It’s dangerous to jump out now!”

All around me was already white. Beyond that, there was Mei-chan’s desparate voice calling to me, and also Souma-kun’s voice trying to stop her.

“A-Ahh — ”

Before I could return any words, there was only silence. After that, I could see again.

There was only the faintly glowing magic circle.

No one else, nothing else.

“No, noo...”

In other words, I’d been left behind.

Chapter 67: Rage

Shrouded inside the light of the transfer magic, Kenzaki Asuna thought about her duel — her worst and most disgraceful memory, it all flashed back inside her brain.

“Ah, a...”

She stared at her hands.

The feeling of pushing off Kotarou was still fresh on her palms.

The light from the transfer magic had faded quickly, but her mind still felt white.

The sight before her was all too familiar, one that could be found dotted all over, a fairy square. But, it couldn’t be said to be a place where safety was absolutely guaranteed.

“Aiee — ”

Asuna felt, like she had fallen into hell.

Because right in front of her, stood the Berserker, mad as an ogre.

“KenzAKIIII, ASUNAAAAAAA!!”

Among the individuals there, Futaba Meiko was likely the only one who knew what had transpired just moments ago. Only that Berserker, screaming in wrathful rage, knew.

The transfer magic had activated as expected. However, on the verge of their return to safety, Kenzaki Asuna had pushed Momokawa Kotarou out of the circle.

And thus, aside from Kotarou, everyone had arrived at the new fairy square.

This was in no way an accident. Kenzaki Asuna had the clear intention and willingly knocked away Momokawa Kotarou.

And being shown the crime in such an obvious display, it was no wonder that Futaba Meiko was furious.

“AIEEEE, N-NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!”

It wasn't Takanashi Kotori, the most cowardly member of the party, that raised that horrified scream. It was Kenzaki Asuna.

That, could be expected though, considering that Futaba Meiko symbolized absolute fear for the girl. The incarnation of unreasonable violence. Her ultimate trauma.

Kenzaki Asuna was not only petrified, she almost downright fainted from taking the blast of bloodlust directed towards her.

And, towards the frightened and helpless Asuna, the mad berserker swung her fist with all her —

“Stop, Futaba-san!”

The explosive sound that reverberated in the fairy square, was accompanied by a huge shockwave.

Souma Yuuto took on her punch, no, the Berserker's Pile Bunker that had the characteristic crimson aura, directly on his palms.

The destructive power burst out, causing bloody cracks to appear on Yuuto's palms. Although he braced himself, he was still pushed back, his heels digging into the ground, because of the impact. If he'd taken that punch half-heartedly, it'd be quite the sight, seeing him sent flying. It was that powerful.

Imagining what if this burning red fist had directly hit the face of the defenseless Asuna... He couldn't help but shudder.

“Could you move, Souma-kun”

He shuddered further from her voice. To him, Futaba Meiko sounded like the grudge-filled sound from his sword before it was purified of its curse... No, hers was much worse.

“I can't do that. Please, Futaba-san, just stop”

However, no matter how frightening it was, no, exactly because the opponent was scary enough that she could kill someone, Souma Yuuto couldn't back down. He couldn't stand to back down.

This was the first time he'd seen Kenzaki Asuna cry. At this time, he hadn't perfectly grasped the whole situation. However, he would still protect Kenzaki Asuna. His body radiated such determination .

"... Oh"

Meiko's eyes sharply looked around her.

Shit. Souma Yuuto thought as he instinctively understood her intention. Futaba Meiko already saw everyone there as her enemy. She had attacked Kenzaki Asuna fully understanding that.

Surely, the rest too could feel her abnormal level of enmity.

Souma Sakura had her bow ready, and Natsukawa Minami, despite looking terribly nervous and alarmed, had her knife drawn.

"Damn... Futaba-san, please, for now, just forgi— "

"Asuna!! Why the hell did you do that, you imbecile!!"

A hysterical scream, along with the sound of a slap, drowned away Yuuto's words.

Everyone saw it. The moment their class rep, Kisaragi Ryouko, had mercilessly thrashed Asuna's cheek.

"Ah, Ryouko.."

"You idiot, idiot! How could, you do that!"

Twice, three times, class rep repeatedly struck Asuna's face. Sakura and Minami who were momentarily dumbstruck, then quickly reacted.

"Stop, stop it, Ryouko!"

"Ryouko-chan!"

The two quickly rushed towards Ryouko and Asuna, separating the attacker.

The mage had hit quite seriously. Asuna's cheeks had turned red, and the individual herself looked quite dumbfounded at the turn of events.

"Class, rep, why did, you... "

Still blocking Meiko's path, Yuuto turned back to ask Ryoko who was being

held back.

“It was the fact that Asuna did something totally inhumane! She pushed off Momokawa-kun before the transfer”

“That... Wasn’t it an accident? It’s true that it looked like she did that, but there’s no reason for Asuna to—”

“If you want a reason, then I have it”

Although he’d rushed in to save the party from the insect horde, Souma Yuuto didn’t know what happened after he’d gotten separated from his party. Of the events along the way, of their meeting up with Momokawa Kotarou and Futaba Meiko, and of the incidents that happened thereafter.

“Futaba-san, I’m sorry... I know this isn’t something that can be forgiven with a simple apology, but from now on, we will help you find Momokawa-kun, cooperating with us on this should be the best option. I won’t ask you to forgive Asuna, but we will surely set things right!”

Ryouko, who practically begged, caused Meiko to turn a cold eye — no, she closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and quietly said,

“Fine, I’ll hear you”

To those words, everyone let out a breath of relief. At least for now, Meiko had fought down the intense urge to murder Asuna right then and there, and stifled her rage.

“First, Yuuto-kun, let me tell you what happened between us and Momokawa-kun—”

Ryouko calmly kept at her story, even as Yuuto showed shock at the delicate yet complicated, bitter and mistrustful relationship amongst them.

“I, I never knew... ”

Ryouko finished her explanation and Yuuto finally understood the situation. No, from his perspective, the whole thing was still quite hard to believe.

First, about the fact that they simply couldn’t function as a party even with Sakura and Class Rep with them... But more importantly, that the gentle Futaba-san he knew had challenged THE Kenzaki Asuna to a duel, and moreover, that

the former had won after beating the latter to a pulp.

Because he had himself once fought Asuna seriously, he understood how powerful she was. However, after taking the blow from earlier, Yuuto also understood how powerful a Berserker was.

The high school girl called Futaba Meiko, in her entirety, had totally changed. This changed girl had in turn changed Asuna... Subjecting her to pure violence, completely destroying her pride as a swordswoman.

It was unbelievable. No, it was more correct to say, he didn't want to believe it.

Nevertheless, since Asuna was in fact behaving like she was in a nightmare, he had no choice but to accept that truth. That for Kenzaki Asuna, Futaba Meiko was the object of her absolute fear.

"Asuna thought that Futaba-san was brainwashed by a curse from Momokawa-kun. So, she thought that if she got rid of him—"

"Th—that's not! I just, wanted to..."

"How was it not like that, Asuna? You caved in to your fear and tried to... To murder Momokawa-kun"

Asuna hugged her head as if she thought it was the apocalypse, and Ryouko stared her down, bitterness slightly tinting her expression.

She understood that the girl was traumatized. She wanted to be on her side, comfort her if possible. But Asuna had in fact committed a grave crime.

It was probably meaningless to debate good and evil in the dungeon. But Ryouko herself had committed a similar crime. That was exactly why she couldn't forgive it. She never wanted to feel that helplessness again, and she wouldn't let anyone else.

"H-hey, class rep, isn't this a bit much?"

"That's right, Ryouko. Think about how Asuna feels, she—"

"Stop, Yuuto-kun, Sakura. Please, do not say any more in Asuna's defense"

Being so sharply reprimanded, the Souma siblings could do nothing but stay

silent.

This problem wasn't one to be resolved with a half-hearted apology. For Ryouko, it was because Asuna was such an irreplaceable and important friend, that she had to face her sins.

Most importantly, this was the only way in order to save Kenzaki Asuna's life. Kisaragi Ryouko keenly knew this.

"Asuna, just for the sake of it, let's hear your side. Why did you do it?"

There was practically no meaning in listening to Asuna's side of the story, since she was already a broken mess. But still, if they didn't hear it, there couldn't be true acceptance. Not for Meiko, not for Class Rep herself, but for the friends who believed in Asuna.

"M-Momokawa... It's all his fault... Everything, because of him..."

"And what did Momokawa-kun do wrong exactly?"

"Ever since we met him, everything's gone strange!"

Asuna yelled. That Momokawa Kotarou was an evil man who commanded curses.

That he no doubt stared lewdly at the girls when they slept, with how he had masturbated in the same place. That Kotarou, who had fortunately joined a party consisting of beautiful girls, secretly planned to make them all his own. And that, just like Futaba Meiko, with her abnormal degree of loyalty towards him, he conspired to put a brainwashing curse on them as well.

"Asuna, stop being delusional"

"No I'm NOT! I'm not delusional! If that's true, then why was I... Why did I get..."

Asuna tried to deny it.

That It was because of the evil brainwashing curse, that Futaba Meiko had brutally assaulted her. She wasn't normal, nor was she sane. 'For Kotarou-kun', she'd kept repeating. There was no way Asuna could see her as sane.

"... Hey, was it really that bad of an injury?"

Everyone could assent to Yuuto's question. The only reason the scars on Asuna's face disappeared so cleanly was due to Sakura's healing magic and Kotarou's ointments that accelerated natural recovery.

"Futaba-san, why would you go so far"

"Because Kenzaki-san wouldn't yield, you see. Also, it was Kenzaki-san who punched Kotarou-kun first. I can't forgive her for that"

"Just, just for that—"

"Didn't I tell you, Yuuto-kun? To Futaba-san, Momokawa-kun is her savior. Momokawa-kun saved her life, where I had abandoned her"

What was more important? Her savior, Momokawa Kotarou, or the girl who had cruelly abandoned her and her merry band of friends? It was a no brainer.

"As for the result of that duel, no one has any right to complain. Still, I regret not being able to do anything to stop it... However, Asuna and Futaba-san both fought with mutual determination and consent. Yuuto, you of all people, don't you think it's undue for someone unrelated to complain?"

"... Yeah, that's right, you're right, Class rep. If Asuna fought by her own will, then no matter the outcome, I have no right to blame"

Although Yuuto said that, Ryouko thought, that he likely wouldn't hold true to it had he seen the state Asuna was in after the outcome. He could show understanding only because the incident was gone and passed.

Which meant that in conclusion, Kenzaki Asuna was the only one for whom that duel from the near past had not ended. The fear, the pain, it all stayed with her, the trauma eating into her.

"Whether Asuna truly thinks that Momokawa-kun can do brainwashing, or whether it's just her way of coping from the trauma... That's not the point we should focus on"

She could show no sympathy towards her important friend.

"Now, everyone please listen. Sure, we had our doubts about Momokawa-kun, we never did fully trust him. But remember, he hadn't in fact done anything to us, while we on the other hand, one-sidedly deemed him suspicious

and went so far as to get rid of him. As a human being, as a fellow classmate, that mode of conduct is simply wrong”

Ryouko argued once more. What started it all was themselves getting disgusted by Momokawa Kotarou’s actions and blaming him. Then, when they had to work together regardless of the strained situation, his every action aroused suspicion.

“Before that duel, I said this, remember? What if our suspicions were all misplaced? What would we do then?”

It was a proven fact that Kotarou didn’t have any brainwashing magic thanks to Kotori’s Eye of Veracity. And in reality, Kotarou hadn’t behaved suspiciously at all, his feud with Sakura was only natural considering the sort of situation he’d been pushed into.

“Whatever the excuses are, Asuna was, without a doubt, first to raise her hand. She pushed him out of the transfer circle, an act practically synonymous to murder. You all should know that”

Asuna had simply pushed Kotarou. She hadn’t done anything like stabbing him with a knife. But that action was the same as pushing him in front of a moving train.

Subjecting him to face the dungeon alone, how would that not be the same as attempting to murder him. Anyone who’d experienced the dungeon first hand should know.

“So, how’s she going to atone for this try at murder of hers?”

Meiko asked class rep the most important question, getting to the crux of the matter.

“We must, save Momokawa-kun”

“How?”

“We will... Continue exploring the dungeon. Since we’ve already teleported, we can’t turn back”

“You mean you’re not going to search?”

“Since everyone’s destination is the same, the only reliable way of finding him

is to keep going, and Momokawa-kun knows that too, don't you think?"

It was extremely doubtful whether Kotarou could actually manage to survive in the dungeon alone. And there was no way to know his whereabouts, and it was unimaginable that he would do something as hopeless as passively waiting for rescue at a nearby fairy square. After all, he'd want to proceed through the dungeon if he had any hope to survive.

"... Fine. But we have to thoroughly proceed through the dungeon to search for him"

"Yes, we should extend our scope of exploration from now on"

The normal strategy was to proceed following their compass, but if they were looking for someone, they would have to take a longer, more in depth route. Even if they couldn't find him in their current zone, there was the possibility of finding clues. The dungeon was complicated, filled with countless zones and paths, so even if Kotarou was in the same zone as them, he might be directed in a different path.

That said, looking through the vast area of the dungeon was a fool's errand. Everyone's goal was to get through this dungeon, so if they missed the opportunity to meet up, then hopefully, Kotarou had already gone further past them.

"So, you're saying you won't be punishing Kenzaki-san at all?"

"Futaba-san, I understand you're angry... But we definitely need Asuna's strength, whether it be for the search or simply fighting monsters in the dungeon"

There was the adage of strength in numbers, but most importantly, there was the fact that Asuna was a Dualwielder, making her an important asset to their battle prowess.

"I do understand that, but isn't that too naive? She tried to kill someone, you know? Do you really think that it's okay to leave her be?"

"W-well that's..."

"Besides, I just can't trust Kenzaki-san, you know? I can't fight with this crazy

murder lady behind me, it'd be better if we left her here. Actually, that's a good idea. After we save Kotarou-kun, we'll come get her"

"Wha!?"

Wasn't that just like making her a hostage?

However, it was reasonable for Meiko to propose such an arrangement.

Kenzaki Asuna, with the intent to commit murder, had pushed Momokawa Kotarou away from the transfer circle. Regardless of whether Kotarou-kun lived or died, it was a crime nonetheless, and a crime mustn't go unpunished.

Meiko, in other words, had proposed to imprison Asuna in that fairy square. Imprison her there until Kotarou was rescued. If Kotarou turned out dead, then Asuna's attempted murder would change to actual homicide... and her punishment would change to life imprisonment. Practically speaking, a death penalty.

"Wait, Futaba-san! please reconsider"

"I'm the only one who wants to help Kotarou-kun. In fact, every one of you don't care, you'd feel better if he was dead... Isn't that what you're thinking? How about you tell me, Souma-san?"

"I, I have not had any such thoughts!"

"But, you don't feel like helping, right? Isn't it a pain? You've finally reunited with Souma-kun so who cares about anyone else, right?"

"I've never considered such selfishness. So, of course I'm willing to cooperating in saving Momokawa-kun"

"Cooperate? Ahaha, cooperate she says, class rep. Souma-san, haven't you've been listening?"

Ryouko reacted like a frog being stared at by a snake when Meiko eyed her in a dry chuckle. She was starting to resent Souma Sakura's fastidious personality.

"Cooperating, don't you mean, it's your duty?"

"Um, Yes.... That's right, Futaba-san"

Ryouko consented with a trembling reply.

Cooperation, in the end, only amounted to much if both sides actually had good intentions. Let's help Kotarou to make amends for Asuna. To Souma Sakura, that's exactly it. What she cared about was her friend, Asuna. Kotarou's life or whatever, it would be the last thing in her list of priorities. In her head, it was only, 'I'll cooperate in order to resolve my friend's problem', not 'I have to go help! Because my classmate's life is in danger'.

Whether Souma Sakura realized that she was weighing the life of a person against her friend's feelings, there was no way for Ryouko to know. However she could quite easily see that to Futaba Meiko, her friend's priority on justice and friendship and what not could only be seen as ill intent.

"See, that's how it is, Class Rep. Kotarou-kun's life doesn't matter to you all... So wouldn't putting up Kenzaki-san's life for his make you guys seriously search for him too?"

If, right at that moment, they actually fought against Futaba Meiko, how many of them would die?

She could preemptively attack her with an Eis Sagitta, scoring an instant head shot... No, not possible. Meiko had Evade and looking at her fighting against monsters, she'd grown proficient in her natural reflexes even without the skill. If she tried shooting magic at her now, she could easily see a future where the girl would swiftly dodge and her own neck would be crushed the next instant.

If that happened, it'd be pandemonium. Most likely, Souma Yuuto would be the only survivor. Since he was a Hero, he could even defeat this Berserker... At the cost of everyone else sinking into an ocean of blood.

They couldn't afford to turn Futaba Meiko into an enemy.

Ryouko desperately repeated to herself: Don't give up. There's still hope.

"Please, Futaba-san... I'll tell everyone to properly search, so... Please don't let me lose anymore of my friends"

Finally, tears started to fall from Ryouko's sharp eyes. With shoulders trembling and voice quivering, she was desperately trying to plead for the safety of her friends.

"Fine, since you've gone to that extent. There will probably be plenty of

monsters and strong bosses on the way so, Kenzaki-san will have to work hard as penance, won't she?"

Meiko said, eyeing the desperate class rep coldly.

"But please know, that Kenzaki-san's life won't be guaranteed without Kotarou-kun's"

With Kisaragi Ryouko's hard-fought pleading, they were able to appease this berserker with no blood spilled.

However, the insane contract where they would exchange one person's life with another's had created a deep, forlorn rift among the party members. Starting with the suspicions towards Momokawa Kotarou, to Futaba Meiko who had changed, turning into the symbol of fear and trauma for Kenzaki Asuna... It was as if a curse had been placed on the party to slowly drive them mad.

"Kenzaki-san, you should thank class rep, she just saved you"

With a smile, Meiko said such words. In response, Asuna's shoulders started to tremble and she began sobbing in bitterness.

"Wait for me, Kotarou-kun. I'll definitely, save you..."

With Asuna's audible sobbing and her many friends consoling her, happening as a backdrop, Meiko vowed to save Momokawa Kotarou in her heart.

Chapter 68: Kizaki Akane and Kitaouji Rurika (1)

“Kyaaaaaaa!”

A girl’s scream, like the tearing of silk, echoes throughout the cave of insects.

“Hey Akane! Isn’t that enough crying, give me some cover already!”

“G-g-gimme a break here— There’s bugs, there’s ants, I can’t do thiiis!?”

In the dark cave where light wouldn’t reach, blazed a spot of fire. This floating ignis elemental fire spirit shone on two girls wearing the Shiramine Academy’s sailor uniform, and also illuminated the forms blocking their way; clacking their large mandibles, what stood before them was a swarm of pawn ants.

“Just shoot dammit!”

“Nooo! ignis kris sagittaflame spearaaa!”

Her eyes moist, the girl called Akane fires a chantless, fire attribute, intermediate level, attack magic.

Having the misfortune of getting involved in a sudden otherworld summoning, she was a student of Class 2–7, Kizaki Akane.

Quite like a girl of her age, faced with large ant monsters, she furiously cried out in her displeasure; but in contrast, her tall and slender figure didn’t allow her to hold such a small and frail image.

With her bob-cut hair, and sweet, droopy eyes, Akane was blessed with tall stature, but had an innocent face and timid personality. She was especially weak to every variety of insect. And faced with such gigantesque arthropods, she was more than likely to lose composure when handling her fire.

“Hot hot!? You idiot! Planning to burn me here!”

“Sorryy, Ruri-chaan!”

The girl complaining to this fire mage, Kizaki Akane, held an iron sword in her hand, solidifying her role as the vanguard. Akane having aimlessly shot magic that made sudden bursts of flame spread out in this narrow cave was quite a reproachable act.

"Well, I guess it took care of some of 'em... Leave the rest to me!"

"Ok, go for it Ruri-chan! *Ei, ignis enchantigniting*"

Having her blade receive the fire enchantment as support, Ruri took her red hot, spark-bursting, scorching sword in one hand, and dived into the fray of ants.

Exhibiting such brave and bold combat, wielding the Vocation of swordsman was Ruri, full name Kitaoji Rurika; another student of the same Class 2–7^[1]

Compared to Akane, who boasted a height befitting a member of the volleyball club, Ruri was around a head shorter. Along with Reina A. Ayase and Takanashi Kotori, she was in a three-way deadlock in achieving the title of *smallest* in Class 2–7.

Small build and a tender visage like that of a small animal. Putting her long, black hair up in a ponytail; it was a heartwarming tale of wanting to imitate Kenzaki Asuna, one she admired for her gallant form.

And despite the difference in appearance in the two, their great courage in taking up the sword to battle fearsome monsters was all the same.

"—*fuuh*, that wasn't too bad"

With fire being effective against the ants, together with Ruri's own martial arts easily cutting into the carapace, all the enemies had been safely defeated. At the end, Ruri took a big swing, dispersing the flames of enchantment, and with practiced motions, returned her blade to its scabbard.

"L-let's get out of this place already"

"Yeah, it's pretty tight in here, too risky. Let's walk faster"

The two girls warmly held hands, walking through the cave.

Kizaki Akane and Kitaoji Ruri, these two were certainly best friends. From a young age, childhood friends who've always been together. However, now they are—

"—Yaay! A fairy square, look Akane!"

"*Huff*, thank god, we can finally rest"

After many encounters with ant swarms, and somehow defeating the formidable mantis, the two had surmounted the cave and made it to an oasis of the dungeon commonly dubbed fairy square.

With the fountain trickling refreshing water in front of her, as if parched, Ruri rushed towards it, scooping up the cold springwater to drink.

“Haa, so good”

And as she cupped her hands to raise a 2nd mouthful, Ruri’s small lips were blocked. What entered her mouth was not cold, soothing water, but hot, vigorous meat. The touch of a seductive tongue, coiling about.

“—M-Mmn! *Puhaa!*? Geez, what’s up all of a sudden, Akane!”

“I-I mean... it was scary...”

Ruri, having found herself held to Akane’s chest, was angered with the sudden deep kiss— or so her blushed cheeks, and clouded eyes failed to support. Looking up, right above was Akane with the same, no, with an even deeper tint of cerise.

“So, hey, it’s fine right, Ruri-chan”

Closing her ecstatic eyes, once again Akane’s soft, pink lips close in.

“N-not fiiiine!”

Perhaps her embarrassment won over arousal, with a shout, Ruri used her thin arms to reject Akane’s face and body.

“O-oh no!? Ruri-chan dumped me!?”

“No I didn’t! Wait no, if you do it so suddenly... I haven’t washed... so I definitely stink of sweat right now...”

Seeing the girl’s lovely figure embarrassedly squirming, Akane’s breath grew rough.

“That’s okay, I don’t mind that at all! Ruri-chan’s smell, I love it!”

Fully ignoring how she was pushed away once, Akane jumps at Ruri’s small body a second time. A strong hold with both hands, as if she’d never let go. Between the breasts whose size you’d reach faster counting *down* from biggest

in class, Ruri's face is buried.

"I-I'm saying I mind!"

"Aah!?"

Rejected yet again, Akane moaned uwuwu as she crumbled to the ground and took a fetal position.

"Geez... don't be depressed, c'mon stand up. We're gonna be doing it together anyway right, the bath"

"Really!?"

With the nimbleness of a cat, Akane *vroomed* her body up good as new.

"Can't really wash my back by myself... so help out you hear"

Hmph, she looked away, playing hard to get as if acting out the age old cliché.

"Ok! Let's scrubba-dub-dub, Ruri-chan!"

With that, the two began taking off each other's uniform. And for a short while, echoing in the fairy square were the sounds of splashing water, and the frolicking voices of maidens.

But that sound had gradually turned fiery; the white, naked figures of the two young women began to fervently, tightly, violently entwine together.

Their secret game, only to be observed by the lovable statue of a fairy, fixtured on top of the fountain.

Their sweat-filled bodies washed clean, Akane and Ruri lay on the soft grass, ever so close, wearing jerseys in place of night wear.

"...It's kinda, like in a dream"

Akane mutters with a sigh.

"Yeah... fighting, dungeon life, I've gotten used to it, but yeah, it's still like a dream"

I didn't mean it like that though, she didn't put to mouth.

Kizaki Akane was in love with Kitaoji Ruri. Even as kids, she had always loved her. They'd fought many a time, but she had never felt true anger, true hatred

towards the girl, she could say that with confidence.

As a child, Akane was much more timid than her current self, and quite socially awkward as well; she couldn't speak up very well. Naturally, those types of children were prone to be isolated... but she had Ruri.

Curious and bold, a rascal who confidently pushed through all obstacles, the ball of feistiness that was Ruri would always grab Akane's hand, forcefully pulling her along, engaging her in various things. For that Ruri, Akane was likely seen as a convenient henchman of sorts to drag around.

Always, at any moment, those two would be together like sisters. Becoming the closest of friends before they knew it, looking back, all of Akane's memories were dyed in the wonderful colors of Ruri's smile.

And when she noticed how great a role that girl had played in her happiness, they had already become middleschoolers. It wasn't the case that something special had happened. It could be said that this realization was the proof of Akane's maturing.

This wont do. I can't keep relying on Ruri forever. I must stand on my own two feet.

With those feelings, Akane joined the volleyball club. Ofcourse, she didn't tell Ruri, it was too embarrassing. That she was tall so it would probably go well, she gave out a simplistic reason.

And as luck would have it, Akane had talent in volleyball. Already a head taller than her middleschool classmates, one could say that just her height played a major role in blooming that talent.

Despite her personality making her weak to tough challenges, with her reasonably good athleticism, and tenacious will, Akane began to grow in body and spirit. She had discarded her awkwardness. She learned to speak while looking straight at the eyes. The members of the volleyball club, her teammates, had all become important friends to her.

But her feeling for Ruri, only those reached deep in her heart.

No matter how many new friends she made, no matter how well she did as the volleyball ace, it wasn't enough. Ruri, if that girl wasn't there, she'd fall

apart. She didn't need to rely on her anymore, neither did she need her hand pulled along. Yet, if that girl wasn't close to her, the loneliness, the pain, something would plunge her into disarray.

The girl called Kitaoji Ruri was her most precious, a special existence for her; That was something she realized soon after entering Shiramine Academy.

“—Hey, that Souma-kun, isn't he like, crazy hot?”

A classmate, a boy they'd seen since middleschool; he was incomparably handsome, he was bright, refreshing, just like a real prince. Or so Ruri described him with glistening eyes.

Akane felt jealousy.

And at the same time, awakened to her sexuality.

Akane perceived her unattraction to the opposite sex. That being said, it wasn't like she would be aroused by females instead.

It was simply the case that, the person she loved happened to be of the same sex.

“...Sigh, I wanna go home”

“Yeah”

When she noticed her love for Ruri, Akane had suffered. Endlessly worried and suffered. Hers was a love that wasn't meant to be.

“I wonder, if they're doing alright, Meiko and Hime”

“I'm sure they are. We're somehow doing fine see, so those two, they're definitely alright too”

Ruri leaked with a sigh, words of worry for her friends, and Akane gently replied.

Futaba Meiko and Himeno Airi. Those two, making four with Akane and Ruri, were friends who would always group together in Class 2–7.

She was bad at cooking, so she'd improve; or so Ruri determined to do in her first year of highschool, and then, her getting along with Futaba Meiko, a classmate and something of a pro at the art, took a natural course in a good

direction. Meiko was of gentle demeanor, and perhaps she was reminded of the timid Akane of day gone by, Ruri soon hit it off with her.

Though when Akane saw her playfully hugging the soft, squishy Meiko who boasted great volume both heightwise and widthwise, it made her burn with quite the jealousy.

As for Himeno Airi, she was a classmate of Akane's since her 1st year 10th grade; their seats were close, they ended up talking, and before they knew it, they'd become friends who hung out. The girl wasn't as outstandingly big as her or Meiko, and wasn't as small, child-looking as Ruri either. Plain and docile, she was a normal girl you could find anywhere... but one of the few who knew of, and understood Akane's feelings.

For Akane, and for Ruri, both Meiko and Airi are their important friends. Though they also worried about their other classmates, they would end up thinking first about the safety of those two.

"Hey Akane, when we get back, what are your plans?"

Though Akane had brought up the subject, as if trying to ease her anxiety, Ruri took it upon herself to carry it along.

"Eh, yeah, I wanna go play around a lot. With Ruri ofcourse... where should we go~"

"If you ask me, it's gotta be the mall. *Kufufu*, I'll go on a crazy shopping spree"

"Preach. So after that, should we go for some expensive fine dining?"

"Ah, what was it, that one, you know, that famous high-class restaurant. The one in front of the station. Let's go there"

"Hey, after dinner, umm... I, kinda, umm, wanna go, to a, hotel, maybe"^[2]

"C-calm your pants... didn't we just do it, pervert"

Ruri says cheeks flushed, laid, sleeping right next to her. *Ah, this is bliss.*

Dungeon survival; perhaps it's because of this harsh environment, that Ruri had relinquished her body to one of the same sex, to her best friend Akane. Perhaps the truth was that Ruri too held feelings similar to hers.

Kizaki Akane no longer cared for the reason.

Her love had been answered. Only that mattered.

Chapter 69: Kizaki Akane and Kitaouji Rurika (2)

The two girls who'd finished their short rest, had once again started to advance through the dungeon.

“—Ignis·Blast”

Akane shot a powerful, volleyball sized fireball which flew towards the middle of a herd of skeletons and exploded, their fragile bones immediately crumbling.

“YAAAAAAA!!!”

Ruri, wielding her sword, began to clean up the skeletons that had escaped the explosion. She was easily able to overpower these enemies without the use of battle arts. Her blade that had been enchanted using Akane's Ignis·Enchant, easily broke down the skeletons.

“Awesome! That's my Ruri-chan, we won so easy!”

“Of course we did!”

Ruri pridefully puffed out her uniform chest where as Akane had on an innocent smile. But in truth, she thought that Akane was much more ‘awesome’ than her.

Currently, she could easily cut down skeletons, but when she first encountered this type of monster, she'd been trembling in horror. She couldn't do anything.

It was scary. She couldn't understand why she was in this dangerous other world dungeon. Fear welled up from the bottom of her heart. No, the feeling was actually closer to despair.

Her only salvation came from when Akane appeared, as all she'd done was weep in despair, unable to take a single step past the first room.

But then, her first encounter with skeletons resulted in her being chased down, breaking her spirit.

“Hey Akane, let's just, die together...”

She couldn't continue living in such a place. She didn't want to attack or be

attacked by those awful monsters. It was all a bad dream—— she was so desperate that she'd be willing to commit suicide to escape from it.

If her and Akane killed themselves together, she would do it.

“——It’s alright Ruri-chan! I’ll protect you!”

However, Kizaki Akane had taken a stand, her hands blessed in fire.

When her tall friend used her Ignis·Sagitta to shoot down the skeletons, telling her it was alright, holding out a hand in a gentle smile, it gave her courage.

“I never knew... You’re so strong, Akane”

She said, taking that hand.

“It’s because you’re with me, Ruri-chan, so I can do my best”

Akane answered, with a smile dazzling like the sun.

She’d always known, that from long ago, Akane always had a stronger heart than herself.

When was it that she’d realized? Was it around when she was in third grade and she noticed Akane had grown taller than her? No, it wasn’t because of the height difference.

She realized that she couldn’t keep pushing her weight around like she did as a kid. She couldn’t be friends with just anyone, as girls would naturally form cliques. It was also getting scary to talk to the boys who only kept growing taller and taller.

But Akane had become stronger. That shy Akane who used to only talk with her childhood friend (herself), had somehow become one of the people at the center of the class. She was also doing great as the ace of the volley ball club.

Surely, it was her who’d become weak. Neither her heart nor her body had grown.

And yet, Akane... She kept piling on complexes towards the girl. She had a massive inferiority complex towards her best friend.

However, in proportion to that, her desire to be with Kizaki Akane only grew.

I don't want to be left behind, I don't want to be abandoned.

Anxiety welled up every time Akane got a new friend. She felt panic as she saw the girl even talking casually with the boys.

She was weak, Akane strong. She knew they didn't match, but she wanted to stay with her, right by her side, forever.

Her feelings only kept growing.

Then, in the extreme situation where her life was on the line, she finally realized— that feeling was called love.

"Ruri-chan, we'll definitely get back home"

"Yes, the two of us together, I know we can"

And so, upon reaching the fairy square after their first battle in that dark and dreary dungeon, they shared their first kiss.

Did Akane, really love her back? They'd kissed despite being the same sex, they'd even gone further than that. Was it just a form of escapism, trying to turn away from the cruel reality they were in? Ruri had no way of telling how Akane really felt.

Yet, their current relationship that was well past just being best friends, was definitely what she'd wished for.

Her itching anxiety and unease about how Akane might one day leave her, it all disappeared, when they held hands, locked lips, and connected their bodies. She'd become as precious to Akane as the girl had been for her. She could believe in that.

The momentary pleasure. The base lust. The unproductive deed of two girls loving each other.

Faulty as they may be, those were the biggest reasons that turned Ruri into the brave swordswoman she'd currently become.

For the sake of Kizaki Akane, her sweet beloved, she would fight. She's told me that she would protect me, so in turn, I'll do the same.

"Well then, wanna get going"

“Ok let’s, skeletons don’t drop any cores anyway”

After kicking away an un-undeded skeleton’s head, Ruri looked ahead at the end of the path. There was a crossroad.

“Sooo, which way?”

“Wait a bit, let me check”

She responded to Akane, who was just behind her, as she checked the note circle that acted as their compass. The shining arrow pointed them left.

“Mm, okay, looks like it’s—”

It happened the moment she raised her head, turning back towards Akane.

A large, black shadow—

“GRRRRAAAAAAAAHHHHH”

An ugly, beastly bellow. Loud as it was, Ruri heard it quite distantly.

“—Ruri-chan!”

Her vision suddenly flipped around. She wondered why that was. She saw that Akane was upside down.

Huh. Why.

With that simple question in mind, Kitaouji Ruriko’s consciousness descended into eternal darkness.

“hoHOho whatT a Delicacy! Hot girl Meat is the bEeesT!”

Kizaki Akane doubted her eyes. She didn’t even want to believe it.

Ruri had, died.

The man had suddenly come from the crossroads. He wore a dirty, black outfit tainted with filth and blood, that differed from the stuff the gomas wore. It was something she was familiar with, the boy’s uniform of Shiramine Academy. She also recognized that face, one that basically everyone in class also knew.

“...Yokomichi, Hajime”

The stain of class 2-7, dubbed Porky, it was that disgusting, unsightly boy.

He howled nonsense. As if he was aroused for some reason. He sounded more like a Goma than a human being. It sounded repulsive and evil.

Fresh blood dripped from Yokomichi's mouth. It was Ruri's.

He's mouth was huge—— it was big originally, but now his mouth could be opened up to the middle of his cheeks—— it looked like that of a monster. And with that mouth, he had chewed into Ruri's throat.

He must've had a skill to kill his presence. Ruri, who'd been getting strong as a swordsman, hadn't noticed him at all. He had caught them in a surprise attack, in every sense of the term, and had landed a strike on her vitals.

"Holy balls, if it isn't Kizaki AkAne. I must be tRippin'!? I get to fEast on 2-7's Yuri couple as a pai——"

"UAAAAAHHHHHHHH!!"

Akane's sight was dyed red. It was no metaphor, all she could see was red from the fire that was roaring in front of her.

This was her magic, but at the same time, it wasn't. Her fiery mana had burst out due to her intense rage.

"Shit, shIT, that's fucking HOT, ya dyke!! Goddamn, Akane-chan, you're a fucking pyroMancer!?"

Unable to take the heat, Yokomichi agilely jumped back, contrary to what his large frame would imply.

"RURI-CHAN! RURI-CHAN!"

After Yokomichi had left her sights, Akane saw what was Ruri's, corpse, lying on the cold stone floor. She rushed over and lifted the small girl's body up from the pool of blood.

"AH, Aa, uaaa... "

She was devastated. Couldn't even say a word, not to mention her lover's name.

Ruri was plainly, painfully, dead.

Her throat was practically gone, meat and bone and all, only a little bit of skin

connected her head to the rest of her. Her head swayed when Akane tried to move her, as if it was on the verge of ripping off, completing her decapitation.

Akane hugged Ruri's upper body with one hand and supported her head with the other.

Ruri's eyes were wide open. Her face was stuck in an expression of shock. Never again could she see her friend's sweet smile.

"Fuck, HeheH, that was Cuh-ray-zee, but don't Ya be thInkin' ya caN take me on with a lil bit of Fire! I got So many ResisTances, you'll—"

A dream. This was a dream, a very bad dream. The worst sort of nightmare. That had to be it, she thought.

"I'm so sorry, Ruri-chan"

Because, she was wrong.

She had magic powers and ended up getting conceited. She thought the she could protect Ruri. That for her, she would work hard, for her, she'd be strong. That they would get out of the dungeon, together.

I, shouldn't have thought.

"Maybe, it would've been better, if we died together back then"

Then, we would've just woken up. The bad dream would be over, and I'd go back to my fun days in school. I wouldn't have to live every day terrified of this dark dungeon. And you wouldn't have ended up being eaten by that ugly monster.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry... I'll, be right there, Ruri-chan"

She wanted to wake up too. She wanted to end this nightmare.

And when she next saw Ruri at school, She'd tell her. Her feelings. Her true feelings. She wouldn't hide it anymore. She'd confess her love.

That was what Kizaki Akane thought at her last moment.

"Ruri-chan, I love you. Let's be together forever— Ignis•Force Blast "

Kizaki Akane and Kitaouji Ruriko. Their figures disappeared beyond the

intense glow of crimson, as if the sun had exploded.

“---Buhha!? That was hella baad! Like, totally shittin’ my pants bad!?”

After the intense blast dissipated, Yokomichi Hajime raised his head. The unchanging stone gray passage had been entirely burnt black.

“Holy shiT, that bitch... Akane-cHan, are yOu some kinda sulcIde bomBer... ”

When he tried to pounce on Kizaki Akane who had exposed her back defenselessly, he sensed the crisis, with what he’d claim were the ‘MC’s 6th sense’. In other words, his instincts.

Shit’s about to go down, he thought, as he came to a full stop and reversed. At that point, Akane’s back was glowing like a bar of super heated iron—— And then, came a massive explosion.

No one was left in that thoroughly empty passage. Only the residues of black ash told of the scale of the recent explosion.

The dungeon passage hadn’t collapsed, most likely because it was magically reinforced. Walls were always indestructibles, Yokomichi surmised.

“Well fuck, not a bite of Meat left...”

It was like he was starving and a delicious full course meal had been laid out for him, only to have the table flipped. In the end, the only taste he got was that of Kitaoji Rurika’s neck.

The maddening taste of a lovely girl.

On the way here, all he’d eaten were unappetizing monsters. He could still eat them, but it wasn’t any fun. They were hard, tasteless, smelly, and unpleasant, like dirt cheap chinese fish they sold at the market.

But, his main problem wasn’t taste.

“Fuck... if I ate Akane-chan and RuriRuri, I could’a healed this gaping wound in my stomach”

The wound once again panged, as he remembered. When he unthinkingly held his flank, he felt the wetness of blood on his fingers.

“Fuck, it horts...”

That, was where Momokawa Kotarou's spear had stabbed him.

Most of his wounds healed up if he left them be. If it was deep, all he'd need to do was eat more meat. When he ate the flesh of monsters, their meat became his lifeblood and quickly fixed any damage.

But not this. No matter how much he waited or how much he ate, it wouldn't close. It wouldn't heal.

The cause was without a doubt, Kotarou's peculiar magic. It had the form of glowing butterflies. The moment they touched him, pain surged violently.

He had the Warrior class and so was resistant to pain. And when he'd turned into a Cannibalizer he practically didn't feel it at all. And yet, those small butterflies reminded him of the human experience called Pain. Quite a lot of it.

"Fuck, my status is totally at Bleeding right now..."

RPGs always have abnormal status conditions like poison and paralysis, but depending on the game, there was also the bleeding condition. The effect was similar to being poisoned. It drained away HP over time, and damage from enemies would increase, for example.

And currently, he would be well described as suffering from bleeding. The blood would clot and scab over, but the wound would open again for no reason. And he'd once again bleed out little by little.

The only upside was that the blood loss wasn't too severe. It wasn't like he was constantly bleeding, and if he simply kept at his monster diet, his current body could actually replenish the blood faster than he was losing it.

But that one wound, it just kept hurting. This pain could even put him at a disadvantage in melee combat with swordsmen and warriors. He needed to get rid of it quickly.

"Gotta keep looking for more prey... Hm, who're the rest of the babes from class again?"

Since those two, Kizaki Akane and Kitaouji Rurika had turned into charcoal, he'd have to give up on them. Hajime turned and walked away, putting a stop to any sort of regret.

"I gotta, I gotta cure This... HeHeh, fucking dEvour you I will"

Just remembering put drool on his mouth.

"Momokawa KoTarou..."

His blood was special. When he'd first eaten Yukiko, it totally blew his mind, but the taste of Momokawa Kotarou's blood had totally eclipsed that.

If Yukiko and other such beauties were first rate cuisine, then Kotarou's blood was a drug. They weren't even on the same level.

As he was a Cannibalizer, by eating girls he could satisfy both his appetite and lust. Once he'd experienced it, he simply couldn't go back to normal food. Even having sex, which he had longed for all his life, felt uninteresting. His hunger wouldn't sate without human meat.

Cannibalism was his lifestyle and addiction... But Momokawa Kotarou's blood, it was something else. In other words, it was different from Food or Sex, it was something, something extraordinary.

He didn't know what that Something was. He didn't know, but he simply couldn't untaste that taste.

"I'm soo gonna Eat You Up, Momokawaa, Kotarou-kyun!!"
